

FORUM SERIES NO.3

TOWARDS THE SAME DISCIPLESHIP

A PUBLICATION OF FORUM

NATIONAL WORKSHOP ON WOMEN AND RELIGION

Organised by

**Forum of Religious For Justice and Peace
Secunderabad 1992**

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Religion & Society

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Hyderabad

Convenor and Facilitator of the National Workshop.

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Coordinated the data-collection of the study in Vijayawada.

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Coordinated the data-collection of the study in Patna.

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HISTORY, THEME, AND DYNAMICS OF THE WORKSHOP

Varghese Theckanath S.G., National Secretary

1. THE GENESIS OF THE THEME

The history of the development of the theme of this Workshop runs almost parallel to the history and development of the National Forum of Religious for Justice and Peace, the agency that has organized this Workshop.

It was a little over five years ago, in the last week of September 1987, to be precise, that 22 Religious women and men from nine states in the country gathered in this very historic city of Hyderabad to establish the Forum. Among its objectives were: The promotion of solidarity and a common search among Religious committed to the poor and the exploited, and to work towards an Indian Theology and Spirituality of struggle. Today, the Forum has developed into one of the more effective voices in the Indian Church that give utterance to the cry of the poor as well as to the groanings of creation for liberation.

If the first meeting of the Forum was meant to draw the contours of our vision and our options, the next meeting at Nagpur in 1989, gave shape to its ideology in the form of a Spirituality for Social Activists. The meeting also recognized the necessity to study in depth the social, political, and economic trends that shape history. For otherwise, our response to events and situations which we confront in the context of our struggle will be inadequate, marginal, evasive, and non-historical.

The first such study was organized in August 1990, and had for its theme "Dynamics of Liberative Struggles of the Poor and the Oppressed". It is the common experience of those who dare to side with the poor especially on issues of conflict, that, by the force of its own inner logic, conflict leads to confrontation that often erupts into violence. The Workshop was an attempt to explore the possibilities and limitations to the participation of Religious in the struggles of the poor especially where there is a risk of the struggle turning violent. The questions considered were: Can Religious support a violent course of action? What is the peace that tolerates injustice and violence of the oppressor? How do we respond to situations of violent struggles? What are the different forms of violence? What happens to a culture when violent confrontation becomes unavoidable? Is there a liberative violence and if so, what is its scope? et al.

The deliberation of that Workshop led us to further focus on a theme that is integral to every human endeavour for wholeness: "Women's Oppression and the Struggle for Liberation". The Third National Meeting of the Forum organized at Mokamah, Bihar, adopted the following Theme: "Institutionalised Violence on Women". It was found that the economic, political, religious, cultural, and legal institutions by the very nature of their ideological bias subjugate one half of the human race because of its gender.

The Meeting also found that the most potent instrument of such subjugation is religion. Since the social life, personal growth and fulfilment as well as the ultimate destiny of a believer are linked up with religion, religion has total sway over individuals and communities. Since most source books of religions have their origin in patriarchal societies, patriarchal values have a great influence on the content and mode of operation of religions. These values are institutionalised, deified and worshipped by both men and women alike. In spite of the radically liberative thrust of the original Jesus Movement, Christianity has, in the course of history, also assumed the same dynamics.

The stories of domination, control, and oppression, narrated by the participants during the discussions challenged us to examine critically the pre-suppositions that sustain such situations within the Church and to find alternatives which would initiate creative and liberative praxis. The Workshop that is under way here is an attempt in the same direction.

2. THE PLAN OF THE WORKSHOP

What exactly will be studied at this Workshop? When the project was first mooted, it was still vague. A small group was constituted to clarify our needs and objectives, to define the project and to formulate its rationale. They came up with some very useful suggestions which helped the National Executive of the Forum to plan the details of the Workshop.

Our study and reflections will revolve around three interrogatives: What? Why? and How? In other words, we shall attempt to explore the nature of the ideology and praxis which govern the Church in India today, the reasons for the pre-dominance of such ideology and praxis and also to discover alternatives which are more egalitarian. The proceedings will have three distinctive stages. Let me outline each of these stages briefly:

Stage I—I begin with a consideration: It is the victors who write history. The constructive contributions and interim victories of the vanquished become obliterated in the process. The history of Christianity is no different. Women who had come to the forefront in the first flush of the Jesus Movement were soon driven back to their homes and hearths, thanks to the onslaught of the culture of patriarchy that entrapped Christianity soon after the death of its founder. Blatantly anti-women statements and attitudes came to have their sway over the ethical and pastoral life of the Church. In keeping with a patriarchal bias, St Paul pronounced man as the head of woman and exhorted her to be obedient, inconspicuous, and silent in public. Some Fathers of the Church ended up by berating women and their role. One of them in the third century decreed in his "On the Veiling of Virgins" that woman should neither teach, baptise, offer nor claim for herself any function proper to a man, least of all the sacerdotal office. St Chrysostom remarked in his characteristic eloquence: "There are plenty of dangerous and harmful animals in the world but none of them is as dangerous and harmful as a woman." Churchmen still speak of women with a great deal of derision. The Pastoral Commission of the Sacred Congregation for Evangelization of Peoples speaking on the role of women in Evangelization, as recently as 1976, said: "It is man's nature to have ideas, it is woman's to act."

If the dominant ideology in the Church is blatantly patriarchal, the praxis in the Church vis-à-vis women is worse. However, while we have ample documentation of the former, data is generally not available on the latter. It is this dearth of documented data on the ecclesial praxis especially in India that prompted the Forum to attempt the arduous task of gathering it.

As the theme of the Workshop, "Women and Religion — a Critical Appraisal", suggests, it was originally intended to include a cross-section of women in the collection of data. But the enormity of the task and constraints of time dissuaded the Forum from going ahead with the plan. Instead, a smaller sample of four culturally- and geographically-variant dioceses — Bombay, Ernakulam, Patna, and Vijayawada — was marked out for the purpose. The survey was further narrowed down to Religious Women in these dioceses. The understanding was that if we have information on the influence of patriarchy as an ideology on women religious, we would also have a picture of women in general in the Church in India.

The collection of data was completed in two phases. In the first phase, the relevant questions were posed to different groups of women religious in the selected dioceses. The open and frank discussions in these groups helped unleash a wealth of information of patriarchal control that women experience at ethical, spiritual, physical, and social levels. Armed with this enormous collection of stories concerning women, we ventured into the second phase of the survey. An elaborate questionnaire was formulated based on the dominant themes that emerged during the first phase. This was administered to all women religious in the four selected dioceses. The data has been collected, processed, and analysed. This will form the "What?" of the Workshop.

Stage II — During the 1960s the psychologist, Stanley Milgram, set out to probe the human "obedience to orders" that enabled the Germans to carry out mass human exterminations during World War II, and at the same time allowed many of their victims to march passively to slaughter. Using controversial, simulated, shock experiments, Milgram showed that an alarming proportion of adults (65 per cent of those tested) were willing to inflict severe, possibly permanent damage upon persons they did not know, simply because they were instructed to do so.

Isn't there a similar trait in the field of religion with regard to obedience to authority? How do we otherwise explain the near-slavish passivity and obedience of people to values and norms which are accepted unquestioningly, but are in fact sociological and cultural aberrations? God is considered the authority-figure from whom such values and norms emerge. This further re-inforces the behaviour of people.

It is necessary to analyse the religious sources that command such passive obedience from believers, with tools of materialist history-writing. A re-reading of the Bible and the Christian tradition (including Church-structures, sacraments, ministry, spirituality, formation...) will be undertaken during the course of the Workshop keeping in mind the mode of production and the social relationships which existed in the life circumstances in which the Christian faith evolved.

But our study will not be complete until we analyse the context of our sources. We will have to go to the roots of the evolution of patriarchy as a dominant ideology that was able to absorb every counter-current that came its way, including a powerful movement like Christianity. We will also have to define the terms and concepts with which we shall have to wrestle during the course of the Workshop. Papers by scholars will give us the necessary clarity on the "Why?" of the theme.

Stage III — "I am an enemy of the existing order," Bernard Shaw wryly remarked in a moment of inspiration, "because our laws make laws impossible; our liberties destroy all freedom; our property is organised robbery; our morality is an impudent hypocrisy; our wisdom is administered by inexperienced dupes; our power wielded by cowards and weaklings; and our honour is false in all its points." In Bernard Shaw, we have the right starting-point in our search for new possibilities. We cannot vacillate on our stand regarding the present order of things in society, Church, and Religious Life. We have to free ourselves of those bondages which have given us nothing but dependence and drudgery. We have to dream new dreams, think new thoughts, plan new strategies, and cultivate new hopes.

The last stage of the Workshop is the time to take stock of ourselves as religious, particularly as women religious in the Church in India today. It is the time for us to probe into our immense strengths and also our inherent weaknesses. It has to be a moment of truth for all of us; a time to pass judgment and take a stand. If a new heaven and a new earth, a new creation, and a new history where there is neither rich nor poor, neither master nor slave, neither Jew nor Gentile, neither pure nor impure, neither man nor woman, neither religious nor irreligious, is to be the goal of our lives, then new categories devoid of the vestiges of our enslaving past will have to be devised. We shall make our contribution to this great dream at the final stage.

3. THE PROGRAMME AND THE TIME-TABLE

The Workshop is so programmed that we shall be able to put the time at our disposal to maximum use in reaching our objectives and at the same time have enough leisure for relaxation, informal interaction, and personal reflection. Today and tomorrow are devoted to the presentation and assimilation of the primary data available to us. We shall also lay focus on certain dominant streams in it in relation to women religious and the Church. We shall do it both in groups and at general discussions in the plenary session.

The next two days of the programme are devoted to analysing the causes of what the data claims, with the help of papers by scholars. Thus we will be prepared to enter perhaps the most important part of the Workshop — dreaming dreams and seeing visions for the future. Though some of us may be against documents, it is one of the hazards of organising a Workshop that we cannot dispense with putting down our findings by drafting a paper. It is my opinion that at the end of this Workshop, we should produce a good document reflecting the synthesis of our deliberations and findings.

But our Workshop like various other seminars and consultations cannot end with mere statements. Our findings here should serve as a basic tool for action groups to experiment

with alternative praxis that will usher in a society, Church, and Religious Life, imbued with our new vision.

4. PARTICIPANTS

Before I conclude, a word about ourselves, the participants. This Workshop is meant to be an exercise of search and research. If we are serious about achieving our objectives, we cannot discount its scientific and academic character. But our search does not begin in books and papers, but in the concrete lives and struggles of people, in this case specifically of women. Hence, a majority of participants are women who are workers and activists at the grass-root level.

While admitting that most of us social activists are professionals in our own fields of activity, we have also to agree that given the nature of our involvement many of us do not feel the need or relevance in investing time and energy to sharpen those qualities necessary for academic work. Hence, to maintain the scientific temper of our study, we need the help of professional scholars and intellectuals. We have invited a few of them. But in selecting them, we have been careful to choose intellectuals who are also activists, those familiar with the life and struggles of people.

A third group of participants come under the category of *special invitees*. These are people who contribute substantially to Church and society, especially in the area of the theme that is under consideration.

We have with us also people representing official bodies like the Conference of Religious of India (CRI). We are very happy to note that Bro. Philip Pinto, CFC, President of the National CRI, is with us. The National Secretary wrote to me regretting his inability to be present with us because he is not in the country at the moment. The Priests' Section of the CRI is represented by Fr Bosco, S.J., the President of the Andhra Pradesh Unit. It is most unfortunate that we do not have anyone representing the Women's Section.

The two representatives of the CBCI we had invited, the President of the Commission for Clergy and Religious, and the President of the Commission for Justice and Peace — declined our invitation due to other commitments.

Considering the nature of the study, the female-male ratio of participants has been kept at 3:1 in favour of women. We are drawn from as many as twelve states of India. The presence of Sr Albertina, an Assistant General of the indigenous African Congregation of Religious women in Tanzania, and of Fr Tissa Balasuriya, OMI, the well-known theologian from Sri Lanka, gives an international and cross-cultural flavour to the Workshop.

No matter where we come from, who we are, and what our background is, what unites us is our search for truth. There are no passive observers in this assembly. Each of us is a resource person in one form or another. All of us will have to contribute actively according to our gifts and talents to make this Workshop an experience that we will long cherish. Hopefully, it will also be of lasting value to our co-pilgrims in search of the truth that liberates.

WOMEN RELIGIOUS IN INDIA — A STATEMENT

"SISTER DENIED OF COMMUNION FOR WANT OF HEADCOVERING".

"PARISH PRIEST ANGRY OVER A SEWING-MACHINE BOUGHT BY THE SISTERS WITHOUT HIS PERMISSION".

"PULPIT BECOMES FORUM FOR HARANGUE OF SISTERS".

"PRIEST WITHHOLDS SACRAMENTS FOR NON-COMPLIANCE OF REGULATIONS ARBITRARILY INTRODUCED".

These were among the many atrocious experiences of the sisters who participated in the Workshop on "Women in the Church" organised by the Forum of Religious for Justice and Peace. Eighty women and men belonging to this National Forum, drawn from 14 states of India and two from abroad, gathered at Jeevan Jyothi, Retreat House, Hyderabad from November 28 to December 3, 1992 to reflect on the situation of women religious in the Indian Church.

These are women and men involved in the liberative struggles of a highly oppressed Indian Society. Increasing awareness of constraints and irritants that interfere with their work motivated them to come together for a serious and systematic reflection on the situation of women in a patriarchal society in general, and of women religious in the Church in particular.

The Forum of Religious had undertaken a survey of women religious in the dioceses of Bombay, Ernakulam, Patna, and Vijayawada. The dynamics of the Workshop revolved around the findings of this study.

DYNAMICS OF THE WORKSHOP

The findings of the study on Women Religious in the four dioceses were placed before the participants at the outset. This was complemented by reports from the Workshop participants. The participants were led to a critical analysis of the origin, mode of operation, and power of patriarchy; its emergence, its development through centuries and the economic and cultural factors that feed and strengthen it as a powerful institution. This was followed by a presentation of a paper on the reading of the Bible from a womanist/feminist perspective to trace the baneful impact of patriarchy even on the very formation of the biblical texts. An effort was made to unveil the hidden theological and sociological biases in the Church against women and the consequent suppression of their roles and rights through the centuries.

The last stage of the Workshop focused on the Women Religious in India. The nature and mode of domination and subjugation and the consequent deprivation of basic human

rights and opportunities was analysed. Ways and means of retrieving the surrendered values were explored. Finally suggestions were made for a better utilization of phenomenal power Religious women in the country possess.

STUDY OF THREE PHASES

The Emergence of Survey — Phase I

It was in 1987 that twenty-two religious women and men from nine states of India gathered in Hyderabad to establish a forum with the objective of promoting solidarity among the religious who are committed to the poor and exploited and work towards an Indian theology and spirituality related to people's struggle.

The following meeting of the Forum in 1989 drew its ideology from the socio-cultural-political context of our country. In order to make the struggles more meaningful and adequate, and make them instruments of creating history, a workshop was held in 1990 both to explore the possibilities and to identify the limitations of Religious in their participation in the struggles of the poor. It also explored their stand towards the use of violence in those struggles. This led the Forum to further focus on Women's oppression in the struggle for liberation.

The third National Meeting which met at Mokamah under the title of Institutionalised Violence on Women deepened the awareness of women's oppression in economic, political, religious, cultural, and legal institutions through their ideological hegemony. The meeting also found that the most potent instrument of women's subjugation is religion which has a total sway over individuals and communities. Since most religions have their origin in patriarchal milieu, the need was felt to study the undercurrents that breed and perpetuate the oppressed status of women within the Church. It aspired to critically appraise the ancient and universal tradition of male domination over women as practised in the Christian religion both in its ideology and practice. It believed that such a study could focus its attention more on the religious women in India, as their institutions technically possess certain powers in decision-making within the Church through the nature and structure of their congregations.

Accordingly the study mentioned above was undertaken in two stages. The first stage consisted of open discussions among various groups of religious women organised in the dioceses of Bombay, Patna, Ernakulam, and Vijayawada. These groups discussed various questions related to different ministries such as pastoral, education, health, social action, formation, government and home-based work (cooking, nursing, maintenance, etc.) as well as factors related to their personal life. These discussions centered around the experiences of the religious women with regard to the Church and congregational structures and their perception of them. Nearly 250 women in the four dioceses participated in these discussions with great enthusiasm and commitment.

The group discussions revealed that most of the sisters experienced sex-based differences and discriminations in their family to begin with, which later continued in greater severity in the religious life and in the Church structures within the context of their ministries. It

was expressed in the form of caste consciousness, fundamentalism, control over women's personality, sexuality, labour, and their spirituality.

Phase II — The Survey

The core group of the Workshop studied together the reflections shared by the different dioceses and formulated the objectives of the final study to be held at the second stage.

The objectives were:

- (a) To explore the patriarchal/feminist (egalitarian), ideological trend related to religion, prevalent among the religious women,
- (b) To study the influence of this ideology at practice level in actual life situations.

Based on the reflections shared by the religious in group discussions, a questionnaire was prepared and administered in four dioceses (Bombay, Ernakulam, Patna, and Vijayawada). These four dioceses were selected as they represented different geographical and cultural areas of the country with a higher number of Christian population. All the religious women of these dioceses were taken as the universe of the study. The sampling technique used was the census survey. The design of the study was exploratory. The following table gives the number of respondents who participated in the study.

<i>Name of the Diocese</i>	<i>Universe</i>	<i>No. of Respondents</i>
BOMBAY	1470	895
ERNAKULAM	3420	2651
PATNA	285	249
VIJAYAWADA	246	205
TOTAL	5421	4000

The questionnaire was translated into Malayalam for the Diocese of Ernakulam and was administered in English for the other dioceses. The data obtained were processed in the computer and simple statistics — like frequency tables, cross tables, co-relation co-efficient were used in the analysis of data.

The following were the findings of the study:

1. The majority of the sisters in the study are from Kerala, belonging to the Syrian rites and are of the upper caste that dominates in number in a very distinct way.
2. Most of the sisters at their thinking level do opt for an egalitarian ideological position and reject the strictly patriarchal thinking and preaching of the Church.
3. The influence of the egalitarian ideological position at the practice level seems to be minimum. At practice level the majority tend to show low self-esteem, less individuality, lack of leadership, and poor participation in decision-making.

4. Their spirituality, even though aspiring towards a liberative struggle-centered one, still is controlled by class, caste, and patriarchal forces in the Church.
5. Their work in the Church-related institutions is more at the lower category of service and is not remunerated justly. Their consciousness is conditioned to demanding regular salary mostly for institutional work (clerical, social, medical) and not for housework or pastoral work.
6. In their sexuality their minds are strictly controlled by patriarchal values, specially in the spheres of chastity, rape, family-planning and abortion.
7. Dalit entry in the congregations is restricted very much invoking reasons like inadequate faith formation and inferiority complex.

These findings of the study as well as sharings of the religious women in groups revealed a structural domination of the Church by the clergy and religious institutions which create a tremendous block not only for those at the grassroots but for those involved in traditional ministries. Such control results in various de-humanizing practices which are revolting and reprehensible.

Phase III — The Workshop

The participants of the Workshop at the very outset shared their experiences of patriarchal oppression in their family, Church, and society. Some of their reflections are given below:

Modern technology is used both to influence the formation of the male foetus and the elimination of the female foetus. When born, the female child is a source of gloom for the family and neighbourhood. As a girl, she experiences discrimination; the male child gets preferential treatment. As a girl, she is deprived of formal education and is directed to her future nurturing task as devoted wife and sacrificing mother. More chains grip her as a young woman. By and large, she is confined to the house; outside the home she is escorted by the male. Though romanticised by poets and artists, the young woman is a growing liability for parents. The monstrous shadow of dowry haunts the family. Once married, the enslavement deepens. She is expected to be at the service of the male in the family, e.g.:

1. Men have to be served first and with the best food.
2. Women may not call their husbands by name.
3. Purda is observed in the presence of men.
4. They have to do puja and fasting for the welfare of their husbands.
5. They may not walk along with their husbands but behind them.
6. In certain places they are barred from sacred ceremonies.
7. In a consumeristic, capitalistic society, she is just a commodity.

The situation of women in the Church is no better than that of their sisters outside. Although they constitute more than half of its population, women are silenced, and they

are the silent section in the Church. Shaped and determined by stereotyped male values, perceptions and needs, woman is the deformed creation even in Christian tradition that claims to be the repository, defender, and promoter of all human values. Structured on a patriarchal model, influenced by the dualism of alien philosophies and culture, the Church has become an exclusivist preserve of the dominant male. Its language, liturgy, and spirituality are all biased in favour of the male. Instead of working actively towards the dismantling of patriarchy and the building up of an egalitarian social order, it has done everything to support and promote the dominance of the male and subjugation of the female through the administrative, sacramental, doctrinal, devotional, and disciplinary structures. The religious congregations, too, are cleverly manipulated and exploited as a power tool in the hands of the male power structure in the Church to serve its interests.

The participants were outraged at such a shameless and open exploitation of women religious in the Church by bishops, priests, and superiors, all in the name of God. They demand that the Church and the religious congregations should be stripped of all traces of these dehumanizing factors, and the egalitarian values of Jesus be made operative in government, formation, community living, prayer life, and apostolate.

These phenomena call for a systematic analysis of patriarchy as power structure and its impact upon gender differentiation.

PATRIARCHY: AN ANALYSIS

Patriarchy literally connotes the absolute and unaccountable power over wives and concubines, children, servants, animals, and real property, enjoyed by the father who is the head of the family, tribe, or clan. As a powerful mechanism patriarchy equips an individual to control the other, disregarding the other's dignity and freedom.

Patriarchy and Society

Socially women are cast into stereotyped roles of wife, mother, virgin or vamp. Biological theories that presume genetic predisposition, reproduction, lactation, irrationality, differential strength — all aim to keep women in a subservient status. Women's label as wife and mother blocks their full participation in the work-force except for careers that are related to nurturing roles, e.g., teacher, nurse, social worker... or to her sexuality, e.g., air hostess, model, receptionist. Due to the gender-based division of labour, women who sell their labour in the labour market are exploited, while on the other hand her domestic labour of cooking, nurturing, reproduction, and caring for the labour force, which is so crucial to the economic system, is rendered invisible. This is due to the capitalistic view that productive labour is only that labour which generates income and produces goods.

To ensure that women remain in their domestic role of wife and mother, these roles are idealised as a labour of love, commitment, and sacrifice which only women are capable of. This idealised role has been sharpened all the more in the last 200 years of industrialised society. Though prostitution existed from earliest times, it became firmly established as an institution of industrialised society for revitalising labour and providing an outlet for

the unsatiated sexual drives of men. In spite of the fact that prostitution generates income through the use of women's body, the prostitutes' contribution to the creation of capital is invisible since she is relegated to the scum of society.

Patriarchal Control of Women's Sexuality

While monogamy is prescribed for a woman to ensure the purity of lineage for her husband, the man is free to find outlets for his uncontrolled sexual drives. A woman's mobility is controlled to ensure her purity of caste and her virginity. A widow's mobility, diet, and dress are restricted in order to control her sexuality. In certain communities, circumcision of a woman is done to diminish sexual pleasure with a view to controlling her sexual desires. Family-planning techniques are all directed at women. Modern technology of pre-selection of the child's sex is made available by the government agencies and is aimed at controlling women's reproductive power. The marriage laws which are in favour of men, keep women shackled to unhappy alliances.

Religion

Religion being institutionalised and developed within a cultural setting is imbued with a patriarchal bias. The Bible is also a product of the patriarchal society of its time. Society in its initial stage of evolution, was agricultural and the emphasis was on reproduction of male children. Women were considered the property of their husbands, hence the rules on adultery. The biologist view of separate traits of women and men were taken as part of religion by the Church Fathers — therefore the view of Eve as temptress with her intrinsic nature to be sinful. The roles prescribed to women in the Church are that of virgin, mother, and loyal wife, which are used to perpetuate women's subservient status in the family. The myth surrounding women is not biological but cultural, which has been given quasi-divine sanction by religion. Women carry on and form the backbone of religious tradition because women depend on religion for emotional comfort, peace, and power to carry on in their oppressed state. Religious involvement helps them to express themselves and gives them the opportunity to socialise.

The androcentric theology prevalent in the Church has provoked the basis for the development of feminist theology; hence it is questioned by scholars. In the early sixties women questioned the method of feminist theology and asserted a need for gender equality. They found that capitalism was using patriarchy to further its interests and so they advocated a struggle against capitalism and patriarchy for gender-justice and equal relationships.

Thus we see how a woman's place in society is one that is assigned to her by men. From the womb to the tomb she is under male domination. She remains in a state of bondage within a complicated cultural, economic, and political process that hinders her recognition of her as a human being like himself. Outmoded, irrational, inequitable, and irrelevant elements in our society are employed to uphold the domination of patriarchal ideology and continued oppression of women at all levels.

Patriarchy in the Bible

A careful study of the Bible from a woman's perspective proved revealing. Such a task has hurdles: like the tools and method of interpretation of texts recorded centuries ago in times, climes, and cultures far removed from ours. For it is undeniable that though the revelation of God takes place on the supraconceptual level, the oral tradition and subsequent writing down of the same are both conditioned in many ways. Ignorance and knowledge, values and prejudices embedded in the culture of the human writer do influence the text. Sifting through these elements is, hence, a necessity.

Thus one finds the length and breadth of the Bible depicting God, man, woman in sexist language. The unnamable God of Israel, Yaweh, "I am who am", though without indication as to whether this divine being is male or female, yet the pronoun used to stand for God was always "He". This sets a historical precedent. The patriarchal cultural ethos has set a tradition in motion. It reaches its culmination in the "Abba" experience of Jesus of Nazareth. God who is a pure Spirit was experienced and expressed as masculine. Evidently Jesus from his infancy was brought up in Jewish piety. Patriarchal Jewish culture prompted Jesus to designate God as Father not as Mother though logically it could have been "It".

Equally revealing are the many episodes and narratives in the Bible. Three crucial moments in the life of Jesus are also examples of this distortion. The incarnation took place in the womb of Mary without the knowledge of man (Mt 1:18-19); at Calvary women disciples were the only Christian witnesses (apart from John) to the death of Jesus (Mt 27:61) and it is they who first encountered the Risen Lord and gave the news of the Resurrection to the unbelieving men disciples. Both men and women disciples were gathered in the upper room before Pentecost (Acts 1:13-14) and the Spirit was poured out on all.

A curious phenomenon is to be found in the figures twelve and seven. As the twelve sons of Israel were the foundation stone of Israel to whom Moses imparted the Law and the Covenant, Jesus the new Moses is depicted as handing over the New Law (of love) and the Covenant. In highlighting the number twelve and seven the main casualty is the women disciples — larger in number than the male who got eliminated!

This last phase is consistent with the first: the suppression of women's role, image, status, and dignity, in the Salvation history. The Yahwist of Genesis 2 is eager to depict a pristine, sinless, and egalitarian society and traces it back to the origins when such a situation he imagines existed. The role of the rib, of the seducer, that reaches man through the woman is all part of Israel's experience not because woman is weak but because her fertility gods belong to the foreigners whom the men of Israel were forbidden to marry.

The first heroines of the liberation story are the bold Hebrew midwives (Ex 1:15-2.10; 4:24-26). A priestly theologian robbed Miriam of her song and placed it in the mouth of Moses (Ex 15: 1-18).

What we notice in these and many similar instances is that in writing as well as in interpreting the scriptures, the influence of a patriarchal culture has been considerable. If, in the understanding of revelation, gender prejudices are taken for divine messages, then our Christian vision gets distorted. One has to be vigilant.

Patriarchy and the Catholic Church

The feudal age brought in a clear distinction between the hierarchy and laity. The centrist structures which began with the pre-eminence of the Bishop of Rome, developed into the papacy. These structures together with the capitalist ideology have shaped the Church as a privileged hierarchical institution, dominantly patriarchal. The close connection between power, status, maleness on the one hand, and powerlessness, subordination, femaleness on the other, discloses a systematic marginalisation of women in the Church.

The early Christian community enjoyed two kinds of leadership: one consisting of apostles and missionaries with their legitimacy directly from the Lord. They were not limited to a local community, but travelled far and wide. The other was local leadership: these were heads of house-churches, bishops, deacons, deaconesses and elders. One should notice that women were heads of house-churches in significant numbers (Acts 17:14; Acts 10:14; Lydia, Acts 11:34; Demaris at Athens, Rom 16:7; Andronicus and Junia, Prisca and Aquila in Acts 18:26, Rom 16:1). Yet the process of patriarchalisation led women from leadership and equal roles to marginal positions.

The second-century shift from charismatic leadership to an institutional consolidation, absorbed both the prophetic teaching and decision-making power to the community. Such a shift from "house-churches" as the house of God, led to patriarchal leadership, which had far-reaching consequences for women's leadership; women were relegated to marginal positions and restrictions were placed on their movements. Women were prohibited from teaching and having authority over men, and admonished to subordination and quiet behaviour. Leading women were restricted to instruct other women only. The texts 1 Tim 2:11, Tit 2:3-5, present two sides of the same patriarchal community. Gradually, even the leadership functions were no more open to all women but to those women who had to overcome their femaleness through the decision to remain virgins.

The imperial era consolidated and confirmed patriarchy in the Church. Christian leadership secured and absorbed the privileges of their social counterparts in the economic and political spheres. Gradually the Church began to exercise controls over wealth and property which embody a capitalist ideology and align with oppressive structures.

RELIGIOUS LIFE TODAY AND TOMORROW

Reflections on the experiences of the participants brought to surface some limitations, blocks, and deficiencies that are inherent in the structures, methods, and even objectives that influence and control over present-day efforts. And, significant gains and breakthroughs that open up vast new possibilities also emerged. When these are brought together and pursued, they can pave the way for new forms of ministries and relevant ways of being religious, that will strive for a new human society. Participants felt enthused about these prospects that seemed to appear on the horizon.

The two major documents of Vatican II, *Lumen Gentium* ch.6 and *Gaudium et Spes* were foundation-shaking factors for Religious Life. They brought down the religious vocation

from a superior and higher status to an ordinary Christian life to be lived in the midst of the people, in solidarity with them and concern for their life struggles. It means that religious life as a particular expression of christian life exists totally for the transformation of the world, participating in the scientific, social, and political areas of human life.

Religious life as a movement with its specific charism then, has to shed its outdated, historical, legal structures and life-styles and be freed to create new structures to facilitate relationships among themselves as equal and mature adults.

The vows and community life are means and expressions of their total secular commitment. Through this commitment they are to be freed from stereo-typed roles and life-styles, recognizing their dignity and right as women in society, created in the image and likeness of God. They can begin to define an image for themselves as prophetic and unconventional. Two models: Mary, the poor Virgin of the Magnificat and Kali or Shakti, the dark unconventional woman goddess, present us with the possibility to dare to live differently.

As God's plan challenges silently in life situations, they are called to respond to the cry of the poor and the oppressed as Jesus did.

Community life with a common vision is a tremendous source of support and encouragement to one another in life and in social commitment. In a world broken by deep divisions in the family, society, and nation, community life composed of varied personalities and cultures is a powerful witness to human harmony and social integration.

Community as a corporate power is to challenge injustices in society. In our Indian society, the 66,000 Religious Women as a massive force, can awaken their fellow sisters and empower them to emerge as disciples of equals in the Church and in other religions.

While Vatican II promotes the above vision, the Cannon Law of 1983 seems to obscure it, basing its norms on Tridentine discipline and monastic values.

Therefore, the life-style envisaged by the spirit of Vatican II can evolve only through a constant struggle against the prevalent, outmoded, legalistic systems, and structures of the Church and society.

The lived experience of women religious can be likened to a volcano that has begun to erupt. The collective experience of years of silence, negation of their identity and image, the frustrations and anger, have evoked a deep resentment in them against the religious systems that have made them a non-being, subservient, dominated, ignorant, the ridicule of clergy and laity.

The five areas of women religious' experience of tension considered were:

1. *The patriarchal institutional Church and the charism of the religious communities*

In the history of Religious Life at every age, religious life emerged as a response to a particular context, e.g., in the feudalistic age Francis of Assisi moved out of the opulent Church to live on the providence of God, relating to the poorest and to Nature. In today's

context of socio-economic crisis, the politicisation of religion, violence specifically on women, it is imperative that we respond as women and men of faith to the cry of the poor, the women, and the dalits. But religious congregations despite their attempts at renewals are unable to move out; instead, they have to conform to the hierarchical and patriarchal Church.

2. Socialization and counter-culture

Through a process of social conditioning, women religious have internalized the male-defined religious mould and denied their own sexuality. Many incidents of sexual assaults, murder, and molestation of women religious in the country taking place today (e.g. Sr Priya, Sr Silvia), symbolize the oppression of women religious. In these instances the silence of defensiveness of the hierarchy urge the religious as women to seek redressal through secular movements.

3. Dualistic and liberative spirituality

Behind the passivity and the culture of silence of women religious there is a spirituality which upholds a dualism of the sacred and the profane. This dichotomy is experienced as mind/body or spirit/body, which identifies the male with the mind and the rational and the female with the body and the irrational. The source of male-dominant spirituality rests here. A re-articulation of spirituality has to begin from women's experience of life — their anguish and protest which gives a liberative dimension to spirituality; such spirituality will empower religious women for commitment to social justice. It calls for a mysticism of everyday life.

4. Elements of a new ecclesio-genesis

Women religious understand the patriarchal Church to be unfaithful to the original vision of Jesus regarding discipleship of equals; it contradicts the fundamental concept of the Church as a Redemptive Community. The emerging Church of the Poor, basic ecclesial communities, and women's movements, are signs of the emergence of a new ecclesio-genesis and a return of Jesus.

5. Religious authorities and leadership

Authority within the religious system cannot but perpetuate the dominant subservient model with its power politics and manipulations. To be authentic to discipleship we need to generate processes for a leadership that animates towards the liberative task of actualizing God's reign through a reversal of values. We have to have such leadership style in community that fosters equal and free relationships.

NEW WAY OF BEING RELIGIOUS—VISION, MYTHS, MODELS

The participants in the Workshop felt the need of a vision where a community of like-minded people guided by the liberative goal, work towards the transformation of society

in solidarity with the poor and marginalized and build a wider, cosmic community living in harmony with Nature and with one another.

The above vision demanded the rejection of old myths that perpetuated people's oppression and formulation of new myths that can lead to a wholistic liberation and create a new social order. These myths can project Jesus not as an end in Himself but as showing the way to the Truth. They would portray Him as a revolutionary liberator, gripped with a mission to stand by the poor and fully freed as a human being. The Eucharist would become a liberative experiential celebration of life with varying symbols and patterns of worship according to the life situations of people. The concept of sin is seen not only as personal but also in its social and structural dimensions. Salvation begins with the restoration of human dignity to the oppressed.

Accordingly the participants strove to work out a model of group-living that would bypass all barriers including religion and caste and living a life in solidarity with the poor according to the gospel values of freedom, equality, and justice. They would integrate themselves with the people in their struggles — their way of life authentic and flexible, evaluated periodically to suit the needs of the times. Hence methodology, strategies, and action would evolve with time and experience. They would find ways and means of economic self-sufficiency and live like the poor.

Solidarity

The first major step towards the realization of this vision is to establish solidarity among the prophetic religious communities across the country. Equally important is the forging of linkages with the many action groups and peoples' movements that are in search of a healthy alternative. These groups could collaborate on issues pertaining to women, human rights, slum phenomenon, street children, dalits, ecology, and other human concerns. Working in close collaboration with existing organizations and movements can help to strengthen the cause of the oppressed.

Formation for Alternative Models

The formation process is to be radically changed as no adjustments are possible within the existing framework. Formation should be linked with the models of community life and hence it should evolve from the mission.

Formation of young men/women who are mature enough but have insufficient experience of life should be given a period of orientation for the mission and to the area they are to work in. Formation should be done by a team who are working at the grassroot level.

Formation should lead to personal growth and a deeper commitment to gospel values. It should include a process of unlearning the patriarchal and capitalistic values.

Personal growth is an on-going process which should result from personal life experience together with the experiences of the struggling people and an appropriate reflection accompanying it.

Constant awareness of what is going on at the micro- and macro-levels and a critical analysis of the political, social, and economic situations is to be observed through necessary academic studies. Formation should include a theology and spirituality that is liberative and growth-oriented. It could be an all-inclusive 5-year-programme before a definite commitment is made.

Cultural and social backgrounds of young religious trainees should be taken into account especially when exposing a person to a new culture. In this connection a dalit sister shared her traumatic experience and struggle during her formation to liberate herself and convince her dalit community that liberation for them is possible when one undertakes a struggle. She appealed for more space to dalit girls to grow as persons in religious communities.

Spirituality

Spirituality refers to the humanization process that is experienced as one accompanies people in their journey of discovering their lost humanity. It is the way of responding to life in mission. As such it is people-centered, mission-focused and life-related.

Contemplation, compassion, community, and conversion are the various components of this spirituality. In this, Jesus becomes our model and inspiration, other members of the work-team a source of companionship, and the people themselves a challenge and support.

Traditional exercises of devotion and practices of piety give way to meaningful and relevant forms flowing with the rhythm of life and mission. The spirit is nurtured and sustained through a new asceticism, i.e., by participating in the struggle for liberation of our people. Protest actions like fasting, dharna, and morchas, may well become valid forms of liberative spirituality.

Dalit Entry

Women in the Church suffer from male domination. Dalits experience social injustice and human indignities. Therefore, a dalit woman is doubly discriminated against in the Church. This explains why even though the dalit people are the majority group in the Indian Church, only a negligible proportion among them have found their place in our congregations. This injustice is due to the inability of members to overcome their prejudices and accept them as equals. Even when a few get into the congregations, they are battered and broken. This shameful phenomenon has to be investigated seriously and justice should be restored.

CONCLUSION

The Indian Church with its centuries of history and tradition in announcing the Good News to everyone, and the religious congregations of men and women serving the people of India through varied ministries, face a tremendous challenge from the pervasive presence of patriarchy around us and within us, reducing our preaching and ministries to a vulgar joke and an empty exercise. A Copernican revolution is called for in the way

we think of, deal with, and relate to women within the Church. Male bias has to disappear and egalitarian values have to govern our lives. The study of Women Religious in the Church and the issues and the reflections reported in this statement demand a deep conversion on the part of all of us, but particularly on the part of the hierarchical Church — bishops, priests, and religious. Any delay to change drastically and any refusal to enact rules and guidelines to bring about change in this regard will lead to serious consequences, threatening the very credibility of the Church and its ministries. If legitimate rights are denied unjustly and reasoning and dialogue have no effect, then they will be obtained by justifiable force.

A “Return to Jesus” is the imperative of the hour. Let a new Church of “discipleship of equals” dawn among us where women and oppressed groups enjoy their legitimate rights as human beings, where gender roles are balanced and reciprocal, where new and bold initiatives and life-styles are undertaken to live a life of commitment, where women participate actively in group decision-making processes, where people of different faiths and of no faith find themselves at home and respected, where linkages are established even with people of other faiths and ideologies for the transformation of society.

Let new forms of religious life rise among us, which respond effectively to the aspirations of the deprived groups, which are very deeply rooted in the various sub-cultures and contexts of the Indian soil in which daring forms of formation are operative and in which cosmic, secular, and liberative dimensions of spirituality get integrated with the vision and way of life of the historic person of Jesus.

The struggling masses especially the women, dalits, and tribals, are our strength and solace; Jesus our inspiration and model; the heroic and committed band of women and men activists are our support and challenge.

Let the Great Jubilee 2000 usher in the third millennium in the Church with the promise of the dawn of an egalitarian and free human society in our beloved land. The past is behind us, the present is before us, and the future is not beyond us.

The volcano has erupted; in the coming years it will not fail to make its presence felt.

INAUGURAL ADDRESS

Dr Vanaja Iyengar

In India we are living through very troubled times. The happenings in Punjab and elsewhere have deeply disturbed all of us. There is the *mandir-masjid* issue. Violence is being preached and practised in the name of religion even though killing, arson, and looting, are not fomented by any religion or creed. At the same time it is a fact that a large number of extremists are fired by faith.

People have conducted anti-human activities for religious, anti-religious, as well as non-religious reasons. In the name of religion, evil deeds are committed.

We may ask: What is Religion? And answer: Religion is a faith which motivates different people, in different ways, in different societies. Philosophers have said it was not God who made man in His image, but man who made God in his image. Laplace, the philosopher-mathematician, once remarked that he did not need God in his hypothesis. Napoleon retorted that if God did not exist, He would have to be invented.

It is also revealing and interesting to read what Marx actually said about religion. He said: "Religion is the fantastic realisation of the human essence, because human essence has no true reality. Religion's distress is at the same time the expression of real distress and also the protest against real distress. Religion is the sign of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world, the spirit of spiritless conditions. It is the opium of the people." You will agree that it is more eloquently put by Marx than by most men of religion. Had the phrase "religion, the opium of the people" not been brutally taken out of context and preached, perhaps the Soviet Union would not have come to such a sorry state of disintegration and collapse.

I have often heard people say that religion alone can teach values. It is important not to confuse religion with values. Every religion preaches values. But these values can also be accepted and propagated by persons without religion, or by those opposed to religion. It is not values that give worth to religion, but faith, a worldview, and a set of rules and regulations.

We are familiar with the controversy arising from the claim made that the natural science and its findings are value-free. It has been reasonably well established that whereas the findings of scientific work are objective and in that sense value-free, the use of these findings as well as the method of science are value-loaded. To reach the truth, you have to go by the path of truth. To use truth, you yourself must be truthful, eschewing any hidden hypocrisy.

The path of religion is not built primarily on values but on faith. Many so-called religious values or the values that are preached in the name of religion, are the result of social necessity. For example, not to kill, to be truthful, to be compassionate, to love one's neighbour as oneself, to have integrity spring from social necessity.

Buddha refused to discuss the existence of God on two counts. One was that after reflecting on this statement, he found he could not prove God's existence. The second was that the good did not require the notion of God. So he enunciated his great truth of the middle way, not as a compromise but as the faith of dynamic equilibrium.

The Pope has recently stated that Galileo was right and the Church of his time was wrong. Today the winds of change are sweeping across orthodox Christianity; and centuries-old negative, and limiting, theological perspectives of the Church are in the process of empowering and affirming the dignity of women.

Generally religion has given women a shabby deal. Women have been kept out of the front ranks. There is beauty in the image of the Mater Dolorosa and certainly Michelangelo's Pieta has a grace of grief unsurpassed. But it is essentially as the intercessor, as the vehicle of somebody else's power to forgive or to aid, that Mary, the woman, is brought forth. And God is quite clearly Man. Eve's creation is symbolic of the status to which women are assigned. I remember, not so long ago in the USA, a woman artist shocked everybody by depicting Christ as a woman. One may ask where woman features in the Trinitarian God: Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit?

In Islam the Holy Prophet had to be a man, quite in the tradition of Jewish and Christian messiahs and saviours. Not that women are despised in Islam. On the contrary, they are placed on a pedestal, to be kept pure and uncontaminated, to run the house but not the world.

Coming to Hinduism, it is a matter of controversy whether Hinduism is a religion at all. It is not a religion in the sense that it is organised in the form of a Church, nor is there a supreme book and authority. Hindus do not have one son of God and they do not have the Prophet to whom God revealed everything.

There are reasons, social and historical, why Hinduism is not an organised religion. One reason is the long and incomplete detribalisation of Indian society for centuries. Another reason is the historical movement away from the pristine equality of tribal society to the divided equality of the village community.

In Hinduism, two distinct strands are discernible. One is the ritualistic conservatism where women are clearly treated as an appendage with the full sanction of religion. Take the example of Sita. Whatever poetic embellishment is added on, the acceptance of the superiority of the "pati" is the essence of Sita. And if "Agnipariksha" was acceptable as proof of fidelity, it was also only a step away from "sati". The purpose of a woman's life ended when there was no Lord to serve.

The other tradition goes back to our tribal past where collective life had its own natural division of labour, where men hunted and women grew crops. This aspect has led to the creation of Power (Shakti), Wealth (Lakshmi), and Learning (Saraswati) — all in the image of woman. Durga, the Mahishasuramardini; Kali, the great destroyer; and Saraswati, the dispenser of knowledge and wisdom — these are tributes indeed to woman as she has been, and as she can and will be.

Of course, this is not to say there are no strong patriarchal elements in Hinduism. There certainly are. The Trimurti are all males: Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiva. The ten avatars do not include a female form of the eternal principle of the ultimate triumph of good over evil. One finds in Radha the ecstasy of devotion and surrender, but it is never the other way round. Kali is eventually stopped in her tracks when Shiva forces himself under her feet. Then there is the Lingam, the worship of an extreme form of male sexual predominance; besides, the marriage ceremony is itself a celebration of male supremacy, sanctified by the slokas, always uttered by a male priest.

To the extent that Hinduism countenances patriarchy, it is no different from Christianity or Islam. Yet, the exaltation and worship of the female principle exists in Hinduism. This principle is manifested in Shakti-power, and ferocious power at that! This power is seen in Durga slaying the demon, or Kali dancing the dance of death. Shakti itself is considered to be the bedrock of the awesome capacities of the Lord of the Seven Hills, or above all in the assertion of the concept of Mahadevi.

Modern historians of ancient India have noted that Hinduism grew and evolved out of a variety of cults and beliefs, which became associated with the more sophisticated Vedic religion. There is no better illustration of the process than the persistence of the female principle in the midst of the spread of male supremacy through the deification of the monarchy that triumphs over tribal chieftainship. This is the incomplete de-tribalisation I referred to earlier.

The beliefs about Shakti were directly expressed in the spread of Tantric practices based on the concept of the motherhood of God, knowledge of whom was to be attained by sensory experience. Shaktism interacted closely with Vaishnavism and Shaivism, the two orthodox branches of Hinduism. Under this influence arose the concept of Bhakti or personal devotion, without the need for priestly intermediaries. While this was characteristic of Vaishnavism, among the Shaivites Shakti was incorporated into Shiva himself, accounting for his primitive forgetfulness and waywardness.

It is interesting to recall that the most influential form of Hinduism associated with Ramakrishna Paramahansa and Swami Vivekananda is based on the Shakti principles as embodied in the Mother.

Those who are concerned with the liberation of the oppressed and the downtrodden should have some understanding of their existing consciousness. The gender question is of course not synonymous with the class question. But the bulk of women in our country are in the exploited and deprived category and the majority of them are Hindus. Religion has a mixed impact on them, very much along the lines of what Marx said: the heart of heartless conditions, the soul of soul-less circumstances, an opiate. In India it is among these sections that the pagan element predominates, and of course, fatalism produced by the doctrine of Karma. But Swami Vivekananda's dynamic interpretation of this doctrine — the Karma of every existence is the Karma to be better in a better world — can and does make a strong appeal.

I feel that at least for the vast majority of our women, it is not the patriarchal element which is the main obstacle in the way of their emancipation. At the level of the poor and the deprived, there is greater gender equality than among the so called upper sections of society. The simple reason for this is the mutual dependence and the community of those who work and suffer.

Gender emancipation requires a consistent struggle against general social oppression, superstition, and ritual. It requires enlightenment, education, and organisation. It requires both an explanation of life and an elucidation of what religion is, what it can do, and what it cannot, and the wrong use that can be made of it.

I believe that it is an illusion and a mistake to put the blame for male domination in society, on religion. This is to invert the true state of affairs. It creates a wrong target in the struggle for gender equality, which is an indispensable part of the struggle for general social equality. What is worse is that it divides those who should be participants in that struggle.

In conclusion may I say that to take up sides for or against religion is never the way to prepare for the battle against male domination or male chauvinism. I am happy to inaugurate this Workshop and I wish you all success in your effort in the direction of equality of women.

A SURVEY OF WOMEN RELIGIOUS

REPORT OF PHASE I

Dr Mary Alphonse

The first stage of the study consisted of open and unstructured discussions on the nature and extent of patriarchy as experienced by various groups of religious women in the dioceses of Bombay, Patna, and Vijaywada. An animation team guided the discussions in Vijayawada and Bombay. The local CRI of these dioceses played a very cooperative role at this stage. In Patna a set of questions was sent to local communities for discussion and they sent back their reports.

In all 290 sisters participated in these discussions: 76 in Patna, 160 in Bombay, and 54 in Vijayawada. Ernakulam did not participate in this first phase of the study. The questions discussed by the groups of religious women in the above dioceses and their responses are grouped under the following categories:

A. NATURE OF OPPRESSION IN THE FAMILY AND IN RELIGIOUS LIFE

- What type of male domination you experienced in your family: can you narrate some experiences of discrimination vis-à-vis your brothers, work, leisure, education, finance, health care, property rights, and economic security for your future?
- What factors perpetuate this domination (value systems, symbols, stereotypes, and myths)?
- What makes you suffer all these?

Most sisters experienced male domination and sex discrimination ever since their childhood either subtly or overtly. They narrated various incidents of control on their freedom as they grew up and observed the absence of such a control on their brothers in the family. Some were compelled to do housework. Preferences were shown towards their brothers in choices of food and clothes. Their brothers enjoyed free time and pursued their own hobbies. The girls were not allowed to do so.

Many sisters had enjoyed equal opportunities in receiving basic education, health care, and religious instruction, along with their brothers. But their access to higher education was controlled by the male members of the family such as elder brothers, uncles, and fathers. The problem of dowry was shown as one of the major obstacles in finding suitable partners for marriage. Higher education meant higher payment of dowry. Co-education was considered unsafe for girls.

Even in their apostolic mission the sisters had seen other women suffering this discrimination in different forms. Pujas, fasts for their husbands, not mentioning the

name of their husbands, purdah, use of sindoor, removing the mangalsutra and breaking glass bangles in widowhood, the absence of widows in certain religious ceremonies, and so on, indicated an inferior position of women in society at large.

Sisters in Vijayawda and Bombay strongly felt that much of the discriminatory value system in society was transmitted into religious life too. The expression such as "Women are not to be heard", "Women should be docile, delicate, and patient", "It is woman who is the source of temptation like the first woman, Eve" — these were used constantly in religious formation too. During the initial formation the sisters were not allowed to ask questions over decisions and they were expected to carry them out faithfully in the name of obedience. At several places the sisters could not freely share their reflections and opinions at meetings. Confidence was shown more in the capacity of priests than of the sisters. At some places the diocesan congregations were controlled by the local authorities even in the details of their dress (habits). Such controls generally affected the sisters both physically and psychologically, and they could not perform to their utmost capacity.

Many sisters had given 'dowry' at the time of their joining religious life. They claimed that they were not aware of their right of equal share in the property. It was all right for them to allow the boys to claim their rights on property while they pursued a life of commitment and renouncement. Some sisters had begun to rethink on this issue.

B. RELIGIOUS FUNDAMENTALISM

- What is your attitude towards other religions? Can people belonging to other religions be saved?
- Would you encourage inter-religious marriages for your people?
- Would you participate in the ceremonies of other religions? Why?

The discussions revealed that the sisters were taught right from their childhood that Christianity was the only true religion in this world. While some found it hard to deviate from such a belief, several had started questioning this absolutism of religions. They realised the need to respect other religions as these too searched for 'Truth' and the revelation of God was possible to any human being. In such a context some seriously questioned the whole understanding of conversion. They believed in the truth of every authentic religion and supported inter-religious marriages. Others encouraged such marriages provided the non-christian partner and children would accept Christianity at a later stage. Sometimes the girl had to accept the husband's religion as she had no say in this matter. A few narrated examples, where the girl, through her good examples won the non-Christian family to Christianity.

Some sisters in Patna disapproved of inter-religious marriages. Reasons given were that the spouses could not be truly united in such marriages as religion touched the core of human life. They feared conflicts arising in bringing up the children. The children's future also would be affected by the religious differences. Some observed that a number of

Christian parents these days looked for non-Christian boys for their daughters for considerations of dowry, caste, and social status. There was no concern for religion in such marriages.

Many sisters participated in non-Christian religious ceremonies such as marriages, death, house-warming, and initiation. This was not done in the past as noted by these sisters. post-Vatican II thrust for Indianisation had led many to adopt symbols of other religions as they were culturally rich. Several could not still approve of such liberalism.

C. CASTE DISCRIMINATION

- What are your experiences of caste discriminations?
- Would you encourage girls of the lower castes to join your congregation?

Sisters in Bombay felt that there was a kind of subtle discrimination, as many communities were based on dominant Western culture, e.g., fluency in English, Westernised lifestyle, dress and food habits. In some of these places the dalit sisters were given hard work and were considered intellectually less capable. The dalit sisters were kept for a longer time in formation and their culture was alien to many dalit girls. They suffered more in the formation period. Some sisters recommended that the formators and non-dalit sisters needed formation in dalit culture in order to understand the sisters.

Most of the sisters in Vijayawada saw no drastic discrimination based on caste in communities. However, very few dalit girls entered religious life. They attributed this to poor education of dalits. Some were of the opinion that dalits had a weak faith and were lacking in perseverance in religious life. Once they received education or training they left the congregations for better jobs. Some said that dalits had a deep inferiority complex, a closed mentality, and slow understanding capacity.

One of the communities in Patna observed discrimination on the basis of regions to which the sisters belonged (Goans, Keralites, Mangaloreans, etc.), colour of their skin, language. Differences were shown in allotting apostolates. The dalit sisters were mostly given sacristy work, reception at parlour, housekeeping, teaching in schools (urban-rural) and farm work. Village work was sometimes found to be a form of discrimination against certain sisters.

D. SPIRITUAL EXERCISES AND EXPRESSIONS OF FAITH

- What way do you express your faith? (daily mass, confessions, prayers, para-liturgical practices, pious devotions, pilgrimages, or any other).
- How far do you see the influence of men in your spiritual formation? (guidance, counselling, direction, etc.)

Many considered prayer and the sacraments as the most important factors for religious life. Lately a few experienced greater freedom and creativity in the way of praying

compared to the rigidity in the earlier times. Reading and reflection on the word of God was also considered as the important component of prayer life. Even though several practised pious devotions and pilgrimages, there was not much emphasis placed on these practices as essential to Christian faith. Some gave importance to retreats and renewal programmes in building up their faith. They saw the sacraments with a traditional viewpoint: e.g., there could not be religious life without the practice of daily Mass.

Friendship, work for the poor, involvement in justice-related struggles of people, and taking a stand for truth, were also considered as part of spiritual life by some. They felt that the religious formation in several congregations did not consider these works as spiritual. Emphasis was laid more on the time spent in the chapel, punctuality, hard work, their availability for service in the community and so on. A few congregations in Patna and Bombay considered involvement in social action as part of their novitiate formation. Prayer was seen as a motivating factor in the development of a wider perspective in life, building healthy relationships and deepening the social commitment.

Several sisters felt that liturgies planned and conducted solely by priests were less meaningful as there was no participation of sisters. Some priests used their powers in an abusive way. They denied sacraments to sisters when there was disagreement or conflict over pastoral matters. Several experiences were shared on this by the sisters in Bombay.

In matters of spirituality, dependence was more on priests. Less confidence was shown towards women as spiritual directors, even though they were adequately qualified. Several sisters after their theological formation in seminaries, never had the opportunity to practise i.e., to guide others in their spiritual formation or write about their theological reflections. Most of the theology learnt by sisters was based on Western concepts and male-defined. There was a dire need felt by some Bombay groups to evolve a feminine perspective to theology and scriptures.

E. FORMATION

- What motivated you to join religious life?
- Did religious formation help you gain a feminine perspective of faith?
- Do you see a double standard of morality in the control of women religious?

A good number were influenced to join religious life by other religious (both men and women) who did a dedicated service to people. One sister from Bombay felt that she could realise herself in total freedom in the service for the poor by joining religious life as this would not be possible in married life.

For many the initial formation consisted of inputs on the charism of the congregation, study of the scriptures, practices of prayer, retreats and spiritual guidance from the formators. Later the inputs deepened through community meetings, theological sessions and spiritual counselling by priests, catechetical training, and other forms of secular

studies. Sisters in Vijayawada and Patna said that the male hierarchy of the Church controlled even the prescription of sisters' dress, their friendships, expression of affection and the definition of chastity. The concepts were so rigid and narrow that sisters tended to hide their femininity, tenderness, and affection for people.

On the question of feminine perspectives in the period of formation, all the sisters admitted that this was a new thing happening recently. Understanding the fullness of personhood and the richness of womanhood came later, mostly through their own reflections and personal studies. Many perceived themselves as mature beings before joining religious life. But after joining they were forced to observe an infantile behaviour along with other sisters. This had regressed to 'baby-hood' in religious life. Their initiatives and creative thinking was curbed, thus damaging their individuality. Childishness was re-inforced by the custom of seeking permissions. One sister in Bombay shared on how she was refused permission to take a little child home from school as he was upset over his soiled clothes. She felt if she were a non-religious she would have done it without bothering for permissions. Sometimes religious life affected such spontaneity. Another sister mentioned that she could not visit hospitals and homes freely as she did before joining religious life and which was a definite source of inspiration for her religious vocation.

Regarding the double standards of morality practised for men and women in society, some sisters saw it as a necessity as women had to bear the consequences physically. Therefore they felt the extra control on women was justified. Several sisters said that the sisters had to leave the congregations while the concerned men or priests went unidentified and unaffected.

Some sisters suffered sexual abuses silently as they had to live under the "patronage" of such priests and the problem was hushed. Sometimes women had to bear the entire blame of being a 'temptress', while men's indecent behaviour was considered as normal.

F. PARTICIPATION IN DECISION-MAKING

- Describe your participation in the decision-making process of your congregation and your ministry.

All sisters felt that they do participate in the decision-making processes of their congregation specially after the Vatican II. All had a voice in the chapters directly or through representation.

In parishes women might as well not exist! They were seldom consulted by priests in pastoral work. Priests made rules while women obeyed them. They played mostly the role of helpers, sacristians, catechists, and cooks. They had no say in the financial affairs of parishes and dioceses. This was shared mostly by groups in Vijayawada. Very few sisters in Bombay had been in pastoral councils at parish and diocesan levels. Even then, the final decisions always rested with the parish priest. Several found the parish priests

increasingly understanding and sharing responsibilities in Bombay parishes. However, the rich, elite, male members of the parish dominated the decision-making processes.

G. WORK AND REMUNERATION

- What is your experience in receiving remuneration for your work?

Those who worked for the diocese in Vijayawada found their remuneration very meagre. They did not participate in the annual planning of the evangelisation work. At the same time sisters who worked in the diocesan offices were paid a regular salary. Pastoral work and house-keeping work were always considered as something obligatory on sisters. Sisters in Bombay expressed that the religious women provided cheap labour to the Church in the name of commitment and service to the Lord! When sisters get involved in issues of social justice, the Church structures came upon them heavily or clearly showed their disapproval. Either these sisters were transferred under certain pretexts, or complaints were sent to major superiors. When sisters asserted their views or confronted the Church authorities on matters of justice or malpractices in some places as explained by Bombay groups, they were denied daily Mass in their chapel.

H. WOMEN AND PRIESTLY MINISTRY

- Should women be ordained? Why?

In all the three dioceses many said that they would not like to be priests, but would like other women to be ordained. Groups in Patna and Bombay asserted that Jesus had no preference for men over women. Several feminist studies and theologies suggest the likelihood of women disciples present at the time of the Last Supper. Some others argue that women had lesser intellectual capacity, were ritually impure on certain days, and traditions never had women keeping confessional secrets. They strongly felt that women could not travel alone in doing the ministry and their reproductive role hindered their effective functioning.

Strong contrary opinions were also voiced against the above arguments. Occasions were shared when women functioned as effective counsellors compared to priests in that area. There were even women who would like to go to women for their sacrament of reconciliation, as they understood the women's problems in a better light. Moreover, women prepared people for the reception of the sacraments specially in the interior and remote areas of their pastoral work. They did the groundwork while men performed the superior function of administering the sacraments. Such happenings were seriously questioned by the Bombay groups. Women's incapacity to keep confessional secrets was strongly challenged by younger sisters in some groups in Bombay.

An important observation was made in all three dioceses that sisters were not really satisfied with the present state of affairs in the Church. Church bodies like CRI and other

should take notice of this situation and work towards greater collaboration of women religious and priests in Church ministries. It was also stressed that women be given opportunities to make decisions for their own lives which would enhance their maturity.

I. CLOISTERED LIFE

It would be worthwhile to note that one of the groups that participated in the discussions consisted of sisters belonging to a cloistered order. Their views were highly traditional and revealed certain information gaps regarding the present trends and thinking in the Church.

They saw the Church and its hierarchically-placed men as a legitimate authority to whom they owed their loyalty and obedience. The difference shown between boys and girls in the upbringing of men and women in social life were considered normal.

CONCLUSION

Sisters who participated in these discussions were a little apprehensive at the initial stage. The proposal for the survey was received with mixed response. However, when the actual day for discussion drew near more sisters came forward to register their names and their number swelled amazingly. Several sisters both individually and collectively acknowledged their appreciation to the animating team in Bombay and Vijayawada. They had found the discussions enriching, stimulating, and broadening their horizon. They looked forward to the second phase of the survey.

REPORT OF PHASE II

JUST A WORD

This project was undertaken in order to explore patriarchal patterns underlying the experience of religious women within the structures of their own congregations and those of the Church. Do these structures really provide them with opportunities for independent thinking and participation in decision-making? It explored how far the existing opportunities help religious women to think and reflect on their own regarding issues that affect women in the Church and how their practices reflect their thinking.

The findings are strictly applicable to the sample population of the study only. They do not claim any representativeness for the large universe in India. However, they do indicate the problem areas of women in religious life that need serious consideration for the future of the Church. Even though ideological correlations exist with several practices, one could say that such influences are at a minimal level only. There is a vast gap between thinking and practice largely prevalent among religious. The reasons that contribute to this gap are not studied in this project. It is up to the Workshop to decide whether to take on such

further studies. The significant relationship of ideology and practice in the dioceses of Patna and Vijayawada should be examined further. Several issues emerge from the findings of this study. They are grouped together at the end of this report.

WOMEN AND RELIGION

"We confess our sin in contributing to *oppressive structures* within the Church itself: the sin of factions and division of caste and language: of mutual recrimination and suspicion among rites: *of giving a lower status to women: of clerical and religious monopoly of power.* We are aware that this sin within the Church has impeded her mission in India and prevented us from being instruments of liberation and witnesses of justice in society. We profess our desire for the grace of a *corporate conversion of heart.*"

(CRI, National Assembly Dec. 29,1991- Jan.8,1992)

Just a few months before the above statement was made by the CRI National Assembly, the Forum of Religious for Justice and Peace had met at Mokamah, Bihar, and felt deeply the need to study the undercurrents that breed and perpetuate the oppressive status of women within the Church. It aspired to critically appraise the ancient and universal tradition of male domination over women as practised in the Christian religion both in its ideology and practice.

Accordingly a study was undertaken in two stages. In the first stage, open discussions were held among various groups of religious women in the dioceses of Bombay, Patna, and Vijayawada. These groups discussed various questions related to different ministries such as pastoral work, education, health, social action, formation, government, and home-based work, as well as factors related to their personal life. These discussions highlighted the experiences and perceptions of religious women with regard to the Church and congregational structures. Nearly 260 women religious participated in these discussions. Areas of study and the indicators were identified on the basis of the information collected through these group discussions. The core group of the Workshop formulated the objectives of the final study to be held in the second stage.

The objectives of the study were:

1. To explore the patriarchal / feminist (egalitarian) ideological trends related to religion, prevalent among the religious women in the four dioceses.
2. To study the practice of this ideology in life situations.

From the reflections shared by the religious in smaller groups, the core group prepared a questionnaire and administered it in four dioceses: Bombay, Ernakulam, Patna, and Vijayawada. These four dioceses were selected as they have a bigger Christian population. They also represent different parts of the country. All the religious women of these dioceses were taken as the universe of the study. The sampling technique used was the census survey. The design of the study was exploratory.

The following table gives the number of respondents in each diocese:

TABLE-1
SAMPLE IN THE STUDY

Name of the Diocese	Universe		No. of Responses Obtained
Bombay (B)	1470	895	60.88%
Ernakulam (E)	3420	2651	77.51%
Patna (P)	285	249	87.36%
Vijayawada (V)	246	205	83.33%
TOTAL	5421	4000	73.78%

The questionnaire was translated into Malayalam for the diocese of Ernakulam. For the other dioceses it was administered in English. The data obtained was processed by computer and simple statistics like frequency tables, cross tables, and correlation coefficients were used in the analysis of data.

SOCIO-CULTURAL PROFILE

An understanding of the socio-cultural profile of the respondents in the four dioceses would be appropriate before one goes into the study of their ideology and practice. This could even throw some light on the ideological practices of the religious in these dioceses.

Age and Years in Religious Life

The following tables give the profile of these factors among the respondents:

TABLE - 2
AGE (percentage)

Age	B	E	P	V	Total
Up to 25	8.5	9.3	6.0	8.8	8.9
26 - 35	27.7	18.4	21.7	24.4	21.0
36 - 45	25.4	23.3	33.7	33.2	25.0
46 - 60	25.3	35.3	30.5	26.3	32.3
61 - 75	11.1	11.6	5.2	6.3	10.8
76 -	1.9	1.3	2.4	.5	1.5
No resp.	.2	.8	.4	.5	.6
TOTAL	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

B-Bombay, E-Ernakulam, P-Patna, V-Vijayawada.

TABLE - 3
YEARS IN RELIGIOUS LIFE (percentage)

YEARS	B	E	P	V	TOTAL
5	9.4	9.3	9.2	8.3	9.3
6- 10	17.8	12.5	14.9	17.6	14.1
11- 20	24.8	17.5	27.7	25.9	20.2
21-30	22.7	30.7	26.1	27.8	28.5
31-40	15.3	19.9	16.1	15.1	18.4
41-	9.9	9.0	5.6	5.4	8.8
No resp.	.1	1.1	.4	.4	.8
TOTAL	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

More than 50 per cent of the respondents fall within the age group of 36-60 in all the four dioceses. The dioceses of Bombay and Ernakulam have a greater number of older religious (61 and above). Nearly half of the respondents in each of the dioceses have spent 11 to 30 years in religious life. A longer period in religious life as well as more advanced age seems to be the predominant phenomena among the respondents of the study.

Education

Sharing in group discussions during the first stage revealed that in education most of the religious had not experienced discrimination. In their families they received the same basic education as did the boys.

The discrimination started mainly with higher education. Many felt that these decisions on higher education were controlled by the men in their families. Indirect relationship of education to the marriage of the girls, i.e., demand for higher dowry along with higher education affected the decision.

One could observe that the majority of the respondents joined religious life soon after their secondary education. And religious life has definitely improved their educational status. This is clearly evident from the following table:

TABLE - 4
EDUCATION (percentage)

	Education before joining religious life					after joining religious life				
	B	E	P	V	TOTAL	B	E	P	V	TOTAL
Secondary	46.3	60.7	39.8	51.2	55.7	16.5	34.2	07.6	24.9	28.2
Sr. Sec.	30.1	17.3	43.8	34.1	22.7	17.1	12.5	18.5	13.7	13.9
Graduate	09.7	05.5	06.8	03.9	06.4	23.0	07.4	23.7	19.5	12.5
Post-Grad.	01.7	00.8	01.2	00.0	01.0	09.7	03.3	12.4	06.8	05.5
Prof.Deg/ Diploma	10.3	12.5	08.4	06.3	11.4	31.8	38.7	34.1	30.7	36.4
Doctoral	00.3	00.0	00.0	00.0	00.1	00.8	00.6	03.2	00.0	00.8
No resp.	01.6	03.2	00.0	04.4	02.7	01.1	03.4	00.4	04.4	02.7
TOTAL	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

More than half of this group have moved higher on the level of education after joining religious life. The emphasis seems to be more on training religious for professional degree/diploma rather than other studies. Preference for graduation and post-graduation appear to be very low among the group in Ernakulam. One-third of them still remain at the level of secondary education.

Profession

The data reveals that among the various professions practised by the respondents teaching seems to be the most prevalent in all four dioceses. The next popular profession is medical work among those in Ernakulam, Patna, and Vijayawada. In Bombay the next preference seems to be social work. Cathechetical work is more predominant among the members of Vijayawada (12.2 per cent).

TABLE - 5
PROFESSION (percentage)

PROFESSION	B	E	P	V	TOTAL
Teacher	30.5	37.3	37.5	29.3	35.4
Secretarial	08.3	03.2	06.8	12.2	05.0
Catechist	03.1	04.1	00.8	12.2	03.6
Social worker	15.0	10.9	06.8	04.4	11.2
Medical	11.6	22.6	27.7	26.3	20.6
Home-based work	10.2	09.2	06.8	08.3	09.2
Formation/govt.	07.8	05.1	09.6	03.9	05.9
Student	09.7	04.3	04.0	10.0	05.8
No response	03.9	03.2	00.0	02.9	03.1
TOTAL	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

On the whole the teaching profession seems to get greater priority among the religious.

Region of Origin, and Caste

The state of Kerala appears to provide more than 3/4 of the religious in all 4 dioceses taken together. However, for the diocese of Bombay, most of the sisters come from Maharashtra and Goa. The number of foreigners in all these dioceses is insignificant.

The states of Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Orissa, and Bihar seem to supply nearly 1/4 of the sisters in Patna and the other 3/4 comes from Kerala. Representation from the North Eastern States is minimal. Vijayawada gets sisters mostly from neighbouring states. Ernakulam is more self-sufficient and has 97.9 per cent of respondents coming from Kerala. The cosmopolitan character i.e., the presence of sisters from other regions, is missing here. The SC/ST population in Patna diocese is 16.1 per cent which is the highest compared to other dioceses.

TABLE - 6
CASTE (percentage)

CASTE	B	E	P	V	TOTAL
Schedule Tribes	2.0	0.0	13.7	0.0	1.3
Schedule Castes	1.9	0.0	2.4	2.0	0.7
Other Backward Castes	1.3	0.2	0.4	0.0	0.4
Backward Castes	3.4	0.8	1.2	8.8	1.8
Forward Castes	57.7	78.8	60.2	58.5	71.9
No response	33.7	20.2	22.1	30.7	23.8
TOTAL	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

The presence of SC/ST members is very insignificant in Vijayawada and totally absent in Ernakulam. The forward castes predominate in all the 4 dioceses (highest in Ernakulam) in spite of nearly 1/4 of the total respondents not wanting to divulge their caste background for various reasons.

Rite

The members of Ernakulam diocese are predominantly Syrian (Syro-Malabar and Syro-Malankara rites). Here the number of sisters who enter from the Latin rite seems to be quite insignificant.

TABLE - 7

RITE (percentage)

Rites	at birth					while joining rel. life				
	B	E	P	V	TOTAL	B	E	P	V	TOTAL
Latin	74.6	01.2	52.2	39.0	22.8	98.1	03.8	98.4	96.1	35.5
Syro-Malabar	23.9	97.2	47.4	58.0	75.7	01.0	94.0	01.2	01.5	63.1
Syro-Malankara	00.9	00.9	00.4	01.0	00.9	00.4	00.4	00.0	01.0	00.8
No response	00.6	00.6	00.0	02.0	00.6	00.8	01.2	00.4	01.5	01.1
TOTAL	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Nearly all of the respondents of Syrian-rite origin practise their rite at present in Kerala. Very few have moved to the Latin rite. On the other hand, in the dioceses of Bombay, Patna, and Vijayawada, the Latin-rite practice is prevalent even among those who are Syrian by birth.

Nature and Geographical Spread of the Congregation

The majority of the sisters in the four dioceses belong to pontifical societies spread out internationally. Diocesan congregations are found more in Vijayawada and Bombay.

Theological Training

More sisters in Bombay (49.4 per cent) have undergone formal theological training. Most of them have done at least some certificate course in theology. Next on the list comes Vijayawada (31.9 per cent), followed by Patna (29.3 per cent), and Ernakulam (23.1 per cent).

Work Agency

Working in institutions/agencies run by the religious congregations is very common in all the four dioceses. In Bombay there are more sisters working under secular authorities. Diocesan authorities seem to feature more prominently in Ernakulam and Patna.

TABLE - 8
WORK AGENCY (percentage)

AUTHORITIES	B	E	P	V	TOTAL
Religious Cong.	79.8	77.0	79.5	81.0	78.0
Diocese	8.9	16.8	17.7	10.7	14.8
Secular	8.9	1.2	2.0	.5	1.8
No Response	7.4	5.0	.8	7.8	5.4
TOTAL	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Whether working in their own institutions gives members the opportunity for independent thinking or autonomy in decision-making, is yet to be explored.

Membership in Significant Bodies of the Church

This occurs largely at the parish level. Very few have such membership at the diocesan, national, and international levels. However, the great majority in Ernakulam, Patna, and Vijayawada do not have any membership in significant bodies of the Church.

TABLE - 9
MEMBERSHIP IN SIGNIFICANT BODIES IN THE CHURCH
(percentage)

LEVEL	B	E	P	V	TOTAL
None	58.4	70.5	67.5	80.0	68.1
Parish	32.6	21.5	20.1	9.3	23.3
Diocese	5.1	1.5	9.2	4.9	3.2
National	1.4	.4	2.4	2.0	.5
International	.2	.0	.4	.0	.1
No response	2.3	6.1	.4	3.9	4.8
TOTAL	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Bombay seems to be more active in holding membership in significant bodies of the Church structures compared to others.

It would be interesting at this point to analyse whether these factors mentioned above have any significant relationship with the ideological positions taken by the respondents. For this, it would be necessary at this point to gain a certain understanding of the concept of ideology in the context of the present study of religious women.

IDEOLOGICAL TRENDS

A religious ideology is promoted through theological teaching and the internalisation of certain values, norms, and explanations through a rigorous training process. Sri Lankan liberation-theologian Fr Tissa Balasuriya states that the Churches have tended to be the last refuge of male dominance and they have given male chauvinism not only a practical expression but also a theological, quasi-divine legitimation (United Laity Front, July 1992).

In the Christian tradition the doctrine of Christology has been used most frequently against women. Thomas Aquinas argued that the male was the normative or generic sex of the human species. Only the male represented the fullness of human potential, while by nature women were physically, morally, and psychologically deficient. Not only by the original fall, but even by the order of nature, woman's deficient nature confined her to a subservient position in the social order. Therefore, the incarnation of God in the male was not just a historical accident but an ontological necessity. Man in himself represented the totality of human nature. He was the head of the woman. He was made in the totality of the image of God, whereas woman did not possess the totality of God's image (Ruether, 1983, p.45).

Even though the Church has always proclaimed the incarnation of God in Jesus Christ as the Good News and salvation for all "Jews and Greeks, slaves and free men, men and women" (Gal 3,28), this has not been truly reflected in practice. Throughout history women have been seriously discriminated against in the ecclesiastical community both on the theological level and at the ministerial level.

During the last five centuries the whole of theology underwent progressive patriarchalisation; the power of thinking, speaking, and teaching, was kept within the ecclesiastical community and gradually appropriated by men while women were reduced to silence. When Christianity became the official religion of the Roman Empire, theology took on the distorted regression to the old royal ideology of God as king, all Powerful; and Jesus Christ the Messiah and Son of David became the "Pantocrator" who reigns over a new society and establishes a new social order with all the characteristics of the temporal rulers. Although there was the affirmation that God transcends the sexes, still there was the identification of the masculine with the divine and the feminine with the weaknesses of the human. This mind-set continues sometimes in the attitudes of Church authorities.

Such ideological positions in theology were radically challenged during the 1970s as strong feminist ideological and theoretical perspectives developed in sociological, political, and behavioural sciences. These had their impact on the feminine perspective of spirituality as women started reflecting together on their experiences as women, in their personal, social, and spiritual life. This began to influence their collective consciousness as an oppressed and exploited group not only in society at large but even in the religion that proclaims the equality of all human beings. Therefore, the emerging spirituality of women

saw God not only in a vertical relationship but also through relational experiences, including struggles, personal, interpersonal, and societal.

In developing countries Christian theology began to enter into the dimension of social justice, and oppression, exploitation, and marginalisation, of women and dalits. The practice of the evangelical counsels in religious life were reconsidered. Women religious began to re-think their life-style and spirituality in the context of justice and struggle. The vow of poverty was not only the usual economising, the asking of permissions but truly because of surrendering of the vested interests and the adoption of a simple life-style (pitching oneself among the poor). It also meant the unreserved sharing of one's resources with the poor and solidarity in their struggle. Celibacy took on the meaning of the freedom of heart needed so as to be available to many without any particular restraints. Obedience was letting one's role be defined by the needs of the people and mission in the discernment of the Spirit's call. The understanding of salvation changed from a narrowed-down perspective of escape from sin, death, and hell in order to go to heaven, to the conviction of total liberation of the person in the context of an oppressive social milieu. This implied liberation from concrete evils such as injustice, slavery, and homelessness, while working for concrete blessings like justice, equality, land, posterity. It is a return to the covenantal relationship with God as seen in the salvation history of the people of God (Fabella, 1986).

The language of patriarchy used in theology and in the Church was gradually changing. More emphasis was given to images of God as mother, the Holy Spirit as female person, Jesus Christ assuming the totality of human nature — male and female —, Mary as an empowered being who contributed effectively to the economy of salvation. Further, there was preference for images of women not as subordinate and submissive, but as transforming and creating new culture expressions in the experience of God. These ideological trends are currently becoming more popular among the women in the Church, specially the religious.

In order to assess how far these traditional, patriarchal perspectives and the feminist (egalitarian) theological explanations have gained acceptance among the religious women, certain statements were formulated. These touched upon different aspects of human experience such as God, human-being spirituality, order of man-woman, death, salvation, and eternal life. These statements juxtaposed the strictly patriarchal ideology with the feminist egalitarian views.

The respondents were asked to choose either position in each of these statements and the egalitarian position was given a higher weightage than the patriarchal position. The aggregate scores of the respondents were divided into categories termed highly patriarchal (lower scores), moderate (somewhat in the middle) and highly egalitarian (the higher scores).

TABLE - 10

PATRIARCHAL/FEMINIST POSITIONS IN THE IDEOLOGY (percentage)

ASPECTS		B	E	P	V	TOTAL
God	Patriarchal	23.9	36.7	24.9	22.4	32.3
	Feminist	73.8	56.3	73.1	73.2	62.1
	No response	2.3	7.0	2.0	4.4	5.5
	Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Jesus	Patriarchal	48.4	75.0	43.8	43.4	65.5
	Feminist	48.4	15.0	51.4	52.7	26.7
	No response	3.2	10.0	4.8	3.9	7.9
	Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Holy Spirit	Patriarchal	28.2	13.8	16.5	22.4	17.6
	Feminist	69.3	76.7	79.5	72.2	75.0
	No response	2.5	9.5	4.0	5.4	7.4
	Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Church	Patriarchal	39.4	57.6	34.5	33.2	50.8
	Feminist	57.6	31.4	61.4	63.4	40.8
	No response	3.0	11.0	4.0	3.4	8.4
	Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Spiritual Life	Patriarchal	15.4	29.4	11.6	17.6	24.6
	Feminist	82.5	62.5	84.3	78.0	69.1
	No response	2.1	8.1	4.0	4.4	6.3
	Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Human Being	Patriarchal	29.2	60.3	18.1	25.9	48.8
	Feminist	68.2	31.3	76.7	69.8	44.4
	No response	2.2	8.6	5.2	4.4	6.7
	Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Order of Man and Woman	Patriarchal	6.1	4.9	6.0	4.4	5.2
	Feminist	90.2	85.2	88.4	90.7	86.8
	No response	3.7	10.0	5.6	4.9	8.0
	Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Woman's role in Church	Patriarchal	15.1	33.3	13.3	8.3	27.1
	Feminist	82.8	56.4	83.1	87.7	65.5
	No response	2.1	9.8	3.6	3.9	7.4
	Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Salvation	Patriarchal	34.5	55.4	23.3	25.9	47.2
	Feminist	57.8	32.1	69.5	66.8	41.9
	No response	7.7	12.6	7.2	7.3	10.2
	Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

ASPECTS		B	E	P	V	TOTAL
Religious Life	Patriarchal	12.1	15.8	4.0	5.9	13.7
	Feminist	85.4	75.3	94.8	90.7	79.5
	No response	2.5	8.9	1.2	3.4	6.7
	Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Soul-Body	Patriarchal	115.3	13.9	9.6	15.1	14.0
	Feminist	81.0	73.8	88.4	79.0	76.6
	No response	3.7	12.3	2.0	5.9	9.4
	Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Death	Patriarchal	16.2	38.2	13.7	8.8	30.2
	Feminist	80.7	52.4	82.7	85.4	62.3
	No response	3.1	9.4	3.6	5.9	7.4
	Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Eternal Life	Patriarchal	24.6	23.3	21.3	15.6	23.1
	Feminist	73.3	67.7	77.1	79.0	70.1
	No response	2.1	9.0	1.6	5.4	6.8
	Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

TABLE - 11
IDEOLOGICAL STAND (percentage)

LEVEL	B	E	P	V	TOTAL
Highly patriarchal	1.9	8.6	3.6	1.5	6.4
Moderate	25.3	42.5	20.2	20.6	36.2
Highly egalitarian	72.7	47.1	76.2	76.5	56.1
No response	0.1	1.8	0.0	1.5	1.3
TOTAL	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Table 10 reveals that the members take different positions on given aspects of the ideology. The pattern of occurrence is somewhat similar in the dioceses of Bombay, Patna, and Vijayawada, and it is somewhat different in Ernakulam. For example, the feminist position on seeing God as a father, mother, and a faithful companion, is not very common in Ernakulam as it is in other dioceses. On Jesus Christ the opinion seems to be divided in Patna, Vijayawada, and Bombay; whereas an overwhelming majority in Ernakulam opt for a patriarchal position. Accepting the Holy Spirit as the feminine person of God is very common in all the four dioceses.

The Church is once again seen through a patriarchal perspective by more than half of the members in Ernakulam. A considerable number of members (nearly one-third) in other dioceses, too, have the same stand. In the understanding of the human being, too, the

patriarchal view is predominant in Ernakulam. Thus it could be observed that there is a mixture of ideological positions among the members on given aspects of ideological trends.

Table 11 may be of some help in order to arrive at a clearer understanding of the ideological stand of the members. A purely high patriarchal stand is of much less occurrence. Even in the diocese of Ernakulam only 8.6 per cent are highly patriarchal. Others have more insignificant numbers. On the other hand a high egalitarian perspective seems to occur more commonly. Nearly 3/4 of the members in the dioceses of Bombay, Patna, and Vijayawada, are highly egalitarian. In Ernakulam it is again less than in the others. The moderates seem to predominate in this diocese.

Such variations between Ernakulam and the other dioceses in the ideological positions could be further studied in relation to the socio-cultural factors explained at the beginning.

Socio-Cultural Factors and Ideology

Factors such as age, period of years in religious life, present educational status, formal training received in theology, the nature of the congregation and its geographical spread, and the respondents' membership in various significant bodies of the Church were studied to see their level of influence on the ideological stand. The result can be observed in the following table:

TABLE - 12
SOCIO-CULTURAL FACTORS AND IDEOLOGY
(correlation significance)

	Factors	B	E	P	V
1. Age	C.C.	.37440	.33556	.64924	.70713
	Sig.	.12878	.00000	.00000	.00000
2. Years in religious life	C.C.	.41246	.34940	.57008	.63217
	Sig.	.00096	.00000	.04403	.00167
3. Formal theo. training	C.C.	.47012	.33126	.48141	.55527
	Sig.	.00000	.00000	.00654	.11979
4. Nature of the congregation	C.C.	.35136	.25924	.39758	.35940
	Sig.	.00001	.00000	.04133	.46761
5. Geographical spread	C.C.	.35816	.35834	.50000	.58512
	Sig.	.00095	.00000	.05006	.00028
6. Present education	C.C.	.37206	.38077	.58317	.59638
	Sig.	.15358	.00000	.01318	.00396
7. Membership in Church organisation	C.C.	.40451	.29232	.55576	.64066
	Sig.	.00342	.00000	.01026	.00001

C.C.= Correlation Coefficient. Sig. = Significance

.001= High Correlation significance.

Taking the values of .001 and below as of high significance it could be observed that some factors have a high significance when correlated with the ideological stand. But this changes from diocese to diocese. For example: the age factor shows a significant relationship to ideology for groups in Ernakulam, Patna, and Vijayawada. The higher the age, the greater the tendency to opt for an egalitarian ideology. Such a significant relationship is not visible in Bombay. Could it be that irrespective of age the members in Bombay opt for an egalitarian perspective in their ideology? Is this due to its urban, cosmopolitan character? This needs further exploration. Another example could be the theological training. Bombay, with half of its members formally trained in theology, and Ernakulam with 23 per cent similarly trained, show a high-level significance in their egalitarian ideological stand, i.e., those who are trained opt more for an egalitarian position. Such a high significance is absent in other dioceses even though a good number of them are formally trained. A similar picture emerges in the dioceses of Bombay and Ernakulam as regards the nature of the Congregation and its geographical extension. That is to say, the national/international character favours the egalitarian stand.

Educational status and membership in Church organisations seems to play a significant role in the diocese of Ernakulam in promoting an egalitarian ideology. The reasons for such variations should be explored further as they may be related to the specific characteristics of each diocese which are not studied here. For instance, the variations in significance of theological training could be due to the nature and content of the training and local cultural factors.

CONTROL ON PERSONALITY

In relation to their personality development as women and as religious, several constraints were mentioned by those who participated in the first stage of the study. The appreciation of themselves as women, occasions to exercise their leadership, participation in the decision-making processes within the congregation and outside, were issues that were discussed and interesting experiences were shared.

Many remarked that their capacity to make decisions got diminished once they entered religious life. A distorted concept of obedience and dependence on permissions, more or less leads to a regression described as "baby-hood". They lacked psychological and mental "space" to reflect and decide on their own; an undue fear of authority crippled their power to think independently and their leadership could be evident mostly in matters like organising prayer services or welfare services for women and children.

Based on these reflections during the first phase, areas such as self-esteem, individuality, leadership, and participation in decision-making were studied during the second phase. The indicators used to measure these variables are given in Appendix I. They emerged largely through the discussions at the initial stage. The aggregate scores in each of these areas were categorised as high, moderate, and low levels. The interpretation of this data is given below.

TABLE - 13
PERSONALITY FACTORS
(percentage)

FACTORS		B	E	P	V	TOTAL
Self-esteem	Low	10.2	32.4	8.8	15.6	25.1
	Moderate	37.4	41.9	40.2	37.6	40.5
	High	51.9	25.2	50.6	46.3	33.8
	No response	0.6	0.6	0.4	0.5	0.5
	Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Individuality	Low	10.0	21.4	13.3	17.1	18.1
	Moderate	71.9	61.0	70.3	74.1	64.7
	High	17.2	16.0	15.7	8.3	15.8
	No response	0.9	1.6	0.8	0.5	1.3
	Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Leadership	Low	28.8	57.7	26.1	40.0	48.4
	Moderate	57.8	40.6	62.2	48.8	46.2
	High	12.6	0.4	10.8	11.2	4.3
	No response	0.8	1.3	0.8	0.0	1.1
	Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Participation in decision -making	Low	46.5	54.1	39.4	56.6	51.6
	Moderate	39.8	38.3	46.2	34.1	38.9
	High	12.1	5.9	13.3	9.3	7.9
	No response	1.6	1.7	1.2	0.0	1.6
	Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

A high level of self-esteem is more evident in Bombay and Patna. Ernakulam features high among those who score low in personality factors. As regards participation in decision-making Patna stands first at the high level. More than half of the members in Vijayawada score low in participation in decision-making. Bombay and Patna seem to lead more or less in all four factors among the proportions of those who stand high. But this proportion of respondents is very small in number.

How far does the ideological stand influence the personality factors of the respondents? This can be observed through the following table.

TABLE - 14

IDEOLOGY INFLUENCING PERSONALITY FACTORS

(Statistical significance of correlation)

PERSONALITY	B	E	P	V	TOTAL
Self-esteem	.1853**	.2943**	.1624*	.2856**	.3333**
Individuality	.2486**	.2959**	.3679**	.2730**	.3037**
Leadership	.1679**	.2564**	.1405**	.2577**	.3055**
Participation	.2056**	.2960**	.1939*	.2144*	.3043**

* .01 significance ** .001 high significance.

A high level of positive correlations are not observed between these factors and ideology. However, in the obtained level of relationship there is a high-level significance (.001) between the respondent's personality factors such as self-esteem, individuality, leadership, participation in decision-making, and the egalitarian ideological stand. Such a significant correlation can be observed in Ernakulam for variables such as self-esteem and participation. Patna seems to go higher in individuality, and Vijayawada in leadership.

In the four dioceses the socio-cultural factors were studied in relation to their influence on personality. The influencing factors were found to be caste, pontifical or diocesan nature of the congregation, geographical spread of the congregation, period of years in religious life, and the positions held in the religious congregation.

The position held by the respondent in the congregation and the geographical spread of the congregation seemed to have greater influence on personality factors. The caste factor affects the self-esteem of the members in Ernakulam and Patna. These two have a higher percentage (78.8 per cent and 60.2 per cent respectively) of members from forward castes. Patna also has a significant number (16.1 per cent) of respondents from SC/ST categories.

The pontifical-diocesan nature of the congregation has an influence on the personality factors of members from Ernakulam and Patna where the respondents predominantly come from pontifical congregations. These variations in the influencing factors could also be due to the specific characteristics of these dioceses. This needs to be studied further.

SPIRITUALITY

A liberative type of spirituality seems to attract most of the members in Bombay, Patna, and Vijayawada dioceses. This implies a participation in the struggles of the oppressed, for the poor/women. Such a type of spirituality is less evident among the members of Ernakulam. They seem to tend more towards a reflective type of spirituality i.e., reflection/

study/work, in relationship to dogmas or teachings of the Church on Jesus Christ/Trinity/Our Lady.

However, when asked about the major component most relevant in living their religious life, most of the members in all four dioceses chose the "service dimension" in their life. Those who opt for struggle with the poor and the oppressed are very few. This once again goes along with their understanding of the concept of option for the poor where the service aspect is highly emphasised by the members of Bombay, Patna, and Vijayawada. Such consistency seems to be absent in Ernakulam. Nearly one-third of them (31.3 per cent) see the option for the poor as struggle with the oppressed. Yet their perspective of spirituality and religious life mostly emphasizes prayer/sacrifice and service. All this could be explained by the following tables.

TABLE - 15
SPIRITUALITY (percentage)

TYPES	B	E	P	V	TOTAL
Affective	16.2	28.4	12.4	17.2	24.1
Theological	23.4	44.1	21.7	22.2	37.0
Liberative	55.0	22.5	63.1	55.2	34.0
No response	5.5	4.9	2.8	5.4	5.0
TOTAL	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

TABLE - 16
MAJOR COMPONENTS IN RELIGIOUS LIFE (percentage)

COMPONENTS	B	E	P	V	TOTAL
Prayer & Sacrifice	10.9	36.2	7.2	8.9	27.3
Service	76.0	56.3	81.5	77.3	63.3
Struggle for Justice Issues	8.7	4.5	10.4	10.8	6.1
No response	4.4	3.1	.8	3.0	3.2
TOTAL	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

TABLE - 17

CONCEPT OF OPTION FOR THE POOR (percentage)

CONCEPTS	B	E	P	V	TOTAL
Nothing in particular	8.6	6.9	7.6	11.2	7.6
Prayer/Sacrifice	9.2	14.4	4.8	8.3	12.3
Service/development	54.1	29.8	53.4	58.0	38.1
Converting the rich	7.4	14.0	9.6	2.4	11.6
Struggle for Justice	19.0	31.3	24.5	17.6	27.4
No response	1.8	3.7	0.0	2.4	3.0
TOTAL	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

In relation to this dimension of spirituality, it would be relevant to discuss here the respondent's choice of option and the socio-economic status of the group chosen to be served.

TABLE - 18

OPTION IN SERVICE (percentage)

OPTION	B	E	P	V	TOTAL
Poor in general	55.1	42.4	47.4	62.9	46.6
Dalits	3.6	2.2	8.4	2.9	3.0
Women	11.0	8.9	10.8	13.8	9.7
Not opted	28.4	42.8	33.4	18.0	37.7
No response	1.9	3.7	0.0	2.4	3.0
TOTAL	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Service to higher socio-economic groups including middle class is highly prevalent in Ernakulam and Bombay. Vijayawada and Patna cater more to the lower-income groups. The majority opt for the poor in general in all the four dioceses. When particular preference is given it is mostly for women rather than dalits. Patna's option for dalits is somewhat higher than that of other dioceses. A considerable number of members in Ernakulam and Patna have not exercised any option yet.

Another significant area in the question of spirituality is the role of men in women's life, i.e., women's dependence on men because of the latter's power over the administration of the sacraments. "Priests enter into the life of religious women in a different way. The difference is based on the sacramental powers that priests have. Even though women can counsel, heal, provide leadership, and perform many other tasks with equal competence as men, the absence of this power makes a difference" — a sister commented during the

group discussions. This dependence becomes a means of control exercised by priests on women religious. Several shared experiences of how they were denied Mass when there were conflicts with priests. Contrary views were also shared by many in group discussions. They found men psychologically more mature, balanced, objective, logical in thinking while women lacked these qualities. Women were considered to be finicky, gossip-minded, unable to keep secrets at least for a long period of time and also less discreet. These members felt that giving sacramental powers to women in these situations would create more problems for the faithful in the ministry.

Even though the above dynamics could not be studied in this survey, questions were formulated in order to understand members' dependence on the daily celebration of the Eucharist and their openness to women's entry into the priesthood. The answers artabulated below.

TABLE - 19
FORGO MASS ON ACCOUNT OF MINISTRY (percentage)

PRACTICE	B	E	P	V	TOTAL
Never miss	29.5	67.6	15.7	15.3	53.2
Sometimes	53.7	29.0	62.7	74.4	8.9
Often miss	12.5	1.1	19.3	6.9	5.1
No response	4.2	2.3	2.4	3.4	2.8
TOTAL	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

TABLE - 20
WOMEN ADMINISTERING SACRAMENTS (percentage)

AGREEMENT	B	E	P	V	TOTAL
No	37.9	83.6	53.4	38.4	69.2
Yes	56.2	13.0	45.8	55.7	26.9
No response	5.9	3.4	0.8	5.9	3.9
TOTAL	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Forgoing the Eucharist on account of the ministry at hand is not easily accepted by most members in Ernakulam. In other dioceses such lapses are tolerated only to some extent. Those who would miss often are a high proportion in Patna. This could be due to the rural-tribal character of this diocese, where the members have to reside in remote areas.

There is high resistance in Ernakulam to religious women administering the sacraments when men are absent for the performance of such roles. Other dioceses are more or less divided in their opinion.

Also, dependence on men for retreats and talks is another dimension of control or influence on spirituality. In other words, even though several religious women get trained in theology, scripture, and different spiritualities, their non-use of such expertise is something to be examined. The study reveals that most of the members use their expertise at a low or moderate level; generally in the form of talks or organisation of courses. Whether these organised courses are given by them directly or just coordinated by them is another question that has not been touched upon by this study. The members' use of their expertise in the form of writing articles to journals or the contribution of papers at seminars is also minimal.

This indicates that women need to develop their individual, theological, reflective capacity. As reported by the participants of the group discussions in the first stage of the study, even though of late religious do get more training for such expertise, they do not practise it, i.e., teaching others. Such training goes mostly unused. This trend would indirectly make women more dependent on men for all their theological reflection and spiritual formation.

TABLE - 21
CONCEPT OF OBEDIENCE (percentage)

CONCEPTS	B	E	P	V	TOTAL
Blind obedience/will of the community	11.4	20.8	9.6	8.3	17.3
Dialogue	33.5	39.3	32.9	26.8	37.0
Prophetic call of the Spirit	55.1	39.9	57.4	64.9	45.7
TOTAL	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

The concept of obedience among the respondents is understood more as listening to the prophetic call of the Spirit and of dialogue with the authorities. Blind obedience or considering it as the will of the community is less accepted. So too, the understanding of "Grace of Office" is seen more as grace given to each individual in the Church and not as a grace bestowed on those in charge of governance.

TABLE - 22
GRACE OF OFFICE (percentage)

DIOCESE	GIVEN TO INDIVIDUALS	GIVEN TO SUPERIORS	NO RESPONSE	TOTAL
Bombay	88.7	4.0	7.3	100.0
Ernakulam	71.7	9.8	18.6	100.0
Patna	88.0	8.0	4.0	100.0
Vijayawada	84.7	7.9	7.4	100.0

Democratic participation was a value emphasised by the groups that met for discussions in Bombay during the initial stage. In several congregations it was sought in the form of consultation, opinion forums, delegation of responsibilities, sharing of information, etc. "Voice of dissent had to be accepted as a sign of a good and healthy community," one group stated. Even though these reflections were not commonly shared by everyone, one could see an evolution from the earlier authoritarian concept of obedience.

How far does fundamentalism affect the members' understanding of other religions? What is their level of interaction with people of other faiths? This area was also studied.

TABLE - 23

FUNDAMENTALISM (percentage)

LEVEL	B	E	P	V	TOTAL
High fundamentalism	6.5	10.3	6.4	4.9	8.9
Moderate	58.5	81.5	56.6	53.7	73.4
Non-fundamentalism	34.3	6.8	36.9	39.0	16.0
No response	0.7	1.4	0.0 ^a	2.4	1.2
TOTAL	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

The non-fundamentalist trend is more evident in Bombay, Patna, Vijayawada. The majority in all the dioceses are somewhat fundamentalist. They are not totally open. A high degree of fundamentalism is predominant in Ernakulam. The specific characteristics of each diocese could contribute to this factor.

The various elements discussed under spirituality were correlated with the ideological position of the respondents in order to see how far ideology influences or controls spirituality. Once again the positive correlation was comparatively low in all the four dioceses. But a high significance (.001) was observed in those who contribute to egalitarian views and their practice of spirituality. These respondents prefer a liberative spirituality; the struggle dimension is seen as the most relevant component in religious life; priority is given to ministry if they have to miss Mass; they welcome the idea of women administering sacraments; they use their theological/biblical expertise as far as possible and are non-fundamentalist in their interaction with other religions.

We could conclude that there are some who do try to break out of patriarchal control in their spirituality and search for an alternative which is egalitarian. This kind of search is more noticeable in the diocese of Vijayawada compared to others.

INVOLVEMENT OF RELIGIOUS WOMEN IN SOCIO-POLITICAL STRUGGLES

The National Assembly of the CRI which met in Dec. 1991 brought out certain specific recommendations. One of them was in relation to People's Movements:

"We are convinced that solidarity with People's Movements is an effective method of working for justice with the poor of our country. We want to study its requirements and equip our religious suitably. We shall organize training programmes for action for justice with a thrust for People's Movements. The methodology will include exposure-experience programmes for those missioned to the social apostolate, outreach programmes for those engaged in the educational, medical, pastoral and evangelical apostolates and for Major Superiors who feel the need for such exposure for their animation work..."

(National Assembly of CRI 1992).

In accordance with the above recommendation there was a certain realisation among the religious of the need to take up socio-political action for the sake of justice. This became clear even in the discussions in the first stage of the study. It was emphasised strongly that there was a need to join people's struggles on human-rights issues. "Religious should be politically oriented in handling issues, but they should not get co-opted by political groups or parties," affirmed several sisters. They also felt that religious were generally discouraged by the authorities from joining such movements. Church structures, too, controlled the religious and their involvement in such struggles. Negative reports were sometimes sent to major superiors about these religious by Church authorities. To express their anger and disapproval in some places the priests refused to say Mass. Situations where both the religious and Church authorities saw the problem eye to eye were very rare.

This aspect was studied through the questionnaire in the second stage. Involvement in socio-political action as well as struggle for women's rights in the Church were generally accepted by the majority of the members (over 65 per cent) in Bombay, Patna, and Vijayawada. On the contrary Ernakulam rejects such a stand to a large extent (73 per cent). Regarding Church support, all the four groups feel its inadequacy. The majority (over 70 per cent) are of the opinion that Church structures are supportive only to some extent and with many restrictions. Very few (5 to 10 per cent) feel a high level of support and this happens mostly in Bombay and Patna. The Church seems strongly to maintain its status quo. There appears to be a superior-subordinate relationship between the Church and religious congregations as commented upon by some members in the group discussions.

Ideologically too, women's participation in political action is supported by the egalitarians and this is highly correlated in the diocese of Vijayawada ($r=.4211$).

TABLE - 24
IDEOLOGY AND WOMEN'S STRUGGLE
(correlation values)

PARTICIPATION	B	E	P	V	TOTAL
Political Action	.2870**	.2191**	.1931*	.4211**	.3257**
Women's Struggle	.1774**	.2624**	.1805*	.2001*	.3241**

* .01 significance ** .001 high significance

RELIGIOUS WOMEN'S WORK

Three major categories of work done by religious women in Church-related organisations were taken for the study. The focus was on remuneration. These works were housework, pastoral work, and work in institutions. Respondents' opinion on different kinds of remuneration was sought. The responses are shown in the following table:

TABLE - 25
REMUNERATION FOR WORK (percentage)

WORK	REMUNERATION	B	E	P	V	TOTAL
Housework	No remuneration	19.6	39.6	20.9	19.2	32.9
	Honorarium	19.9	16.0	21.3	24.6	17.6
	Regular salary	47.2	19.7	50.2	36.5	28.6
	No response	13.3	24.8	7.6	19.7	20.9
	Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Pastoral Work	No remuneration	22.6	79.9	17.7	24.8	60.3
	Honorarium	20.1	4.7	29.3	29.1	13.2
	Regular salary	36.4	2.8	45.4	29.6	14.2
	No response	11.0	12.6	7.6	17.2	12.2
	Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Institutional	No remuneration	7.7	10.6	8.4	8.4	9.7
	Honararium	9.6	13.0	14.9	23.2	12.9
	Regular salary	72.7	58.6	69.1	52.7	62.1
	No response	10.0	17.8	7.6	15.8	15.3
	Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

The general trend noted in the case of institutional work was that a large proportion of the members demand regular salary for it in comparison to other works. Such demands seem to be greater in Bombay and Patna. For pastoral work the opinion is divided in the dioceses of Bombay, Patna, and Vijayawada, whereas in Ernakulam the overwhelming majority (80 per cent) opt for no remuneration for this work. In Bombay and Patna a higher proportion demand regular salary for housework, compared to others. Once again Ernakulam stands high in opting for no remuneration for housework.

Can it be that the productive nature of housework or pastoral work has not been understood by the members? Or is such work seen in the light of dedication and commitment which cannot be equated in monetary terms? Are not men religious entitled to remuneration in pastoral or in housework?

CONTROL ON MOBILITY

The majority of the members in Ernakulam do not travel alone. They often or always travel with an escort or companion. Such dependency is much lower in other dioceses. Capacity to travel alone is displayed to a greater extent by the members of Patna diocese. The rural and tribal environment in this area could be one of the factors that necessitate such independence in travelling.

TABLE - 26

TRAVEL WITH ESCORT (percentage)

FREQUENCY	B	E	P	V	TOTAL
Never	18.5	1.4	18.5	16.2	7.1
Seldom	26.9	11.9	36.1	24.0	17.4
Sometimes	36.5	18.9	31.5	43.6	24.9
Often	8.4	52.7	6.4	9.8	37.7
Always	5.7	13.0	6.0	2.0	10.4
No response	3.9	2.0	1.6	4.4	2.5
TOTAL	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Correlation : $r =$	-.0569	.0853	-.3393	.2203	-.0956

Such independence to travel more often without an escort displayed by a higher proportion of members in Patna diocese has also a higher significant correlation with the egalitarian ideology (-.3393 with the significance of .001). That is to say that higher the egalitarian ideology, lower is the tendency to depend on an escort while travelling.

Some significant findings regarding the social mobility of women in the hierarchy of Church structures could be observed in this study. Different positions in the hierarchy were identified for the study. These ranged from cook / cleaner / housekeeper to Diocesan Chancellors.

Even though many of the positions mentioned here (Ref. Appendix-I Question No. 37) are not occupied by women, the study intended to explore the members' opinion with reference to such positions for women who are duly trained. Weightage was given according to the order of these positions in the hierarchy. The aggregate scores were then categorised as very low, moderate, high, and very high. Ernakulam tends not to favour much women occupying higher positions like women deacons, priests, bishops, diocesan directors, marriage-tribunal judges and Diocesan Chancellors. On the contrary, the opinion of other dioceses favours such mobility for women. This becomes apparent through the following table:

TABLE - 27

FAVOURABILITY IN WOMEN OCCUPYING HIGHER POSITIONS
(percentage)

FAVOURABILITIES	B	E	P	V	TOTAL
Very low	.9	12.1	.4	4.4	8.5
Low	13.7	47.6	16.5	15.6	36.4
Moderate	19.9	25.1	11.6	20.5	22.9
High	30.5	6.8	26.1	21.5	14.0
Very high	31.9	2.5	45.0	33.7	13.3
No response	3.1	6.0	.4	4.4	4.9
TOTAL	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Among those who are very highly in favour, Patna seems to be leading.

In order to assess the actual situation in parishes, a question was asked on relation to the following positions that exist in the Church at present. They are cook/housekeeper, sacristian, para-liturgist, ministries of the eucharist, parish-council office, and B.C.C. leaders. As per table 27 one could say that a higher proportion of the members in Ernakulam felt that the position of women as cook/housekeeper exists to a great extent in their diocese. In Bombay a higher proportion of members felt that women occupy positions such as para-liturgists, ministers of the eucharist, office in parish councils, and B.C.C. leaders to a great extent. This trend somewhat declines for other dioceses. As one of the factors, could it be that the urban character of Bombay influences this trend of women occupying decision-making positions?

TABLE - 28

RELIGIOUS WOMEN'S POSITIONS IN THE CHURCH (percentage)

POSITION	LEVEL	B	E	P	V	TOTAL
Cook	Not at all	31.8	14.7	34.9	29.6	20.5
	Some ext.	43.0	37.0	51.4	46.8	39.8
	Great ext.	12.3	32.6	9.2	14.8	25.7
	No response	13.0	15.7	4.4	8.9	14.1
	Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Sacristan	Not at all	19.9	17.5	16.5	12.8	17.8
	Some ext.	43.6	38.9	51.0	46.3	41.1
	Great ext.	26.1	26.9	28.5	31.5	27.0
	No response	11.7	29.7	5.6	12.8	23.3
	Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Para-Liturgist	Not at all	12.2	24.7	18.1	31.0	21.8
	Some ext.	55.1	27.9	59.8	45.3	36.9
	Great ext.	20.9	17.8	16.5	10.8	18.0
	No response	11.7	29.7	5.6	12.8	23.3
	Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Eucharist Ministers	Not at all	18.0	55.3	39.4	52.7	45.9
	Some ext.	37.1	11.0	42.6	29.1	19.7
	Great ext.	35.0	5.4	12.4	1.5	12.3
	No response	9.8	28.3	5.6	16.7	22.1
	Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Parish Council Office	Not at all	20.6	46.2	34.5	41.9	39.5
	Some ext.	47.9	15.1	47.4	32.5	25.3
	Great ext.	20.7	10.9	12.4	9.9	13.2
	No response	10.9	27.8	5.6	15.8	22.0
	Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
B.C.C.	Not at all	14.5	68.3	45.8	47.5	53.8
	Some ext.	42.5	0.6	36.1	24.3	13.4
	Great ext.	33.6	1.3	5.6	3.5	8.9
	No response	9.4	29.8	12.4	24.8	23.9
	Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

The extent of ideological influence on the opinion of women's social mobility in the Church was studied.

On the position of cook/housekeeper and sacristan, Bombay and Patna show a negative correlation. Members with egalitarian ideology seemed to oppose these kinds of appointments for religious women. On higher positions the positive correlation is significant in Vijayawada, Ernakulam, and Patna, compared to Bombay, among those who favour these positions.

CONTROL ON SEXUALITY

The different areas considered under the question of sexuality are: Respondent's practice of health habits; views on menstrual cycle; women's responsibility in provoking men sexually; sins against chastity; knowledge of family-planning methods; advice they give on family-planning methods; their stand on conditional abortion for women and the nature of help that could be given to a rape victim, when necessary.

TABLE - 29
PRACTICE OF HEALTH HABITS
(percentage)

REGULARITY	B	E	P	V	TOTAL
Not regular	7.8	13.4	2.4	5.4	11.1
Somewhat regular	56.4	49.7	47.0	58.5	51.5
Very regular	33.9	31.8	47.4	32.2	33.3
No response	1.9	5.1	3.2	3.9	4.2
TOTAL	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

TABLE - 30
MENSTRUATION AS A BURDEN
(percentage)

AGREEMENT	B	E	P	V	TOTAL
Never	37.2	40.4	29.3	28.8	38.4
Sometimes	57.8	50.2	64.7	63.4	53.5
Always	2.2	2.7	3.2	4.4	2.7
No response	2.8	6.7	2.8	3.4	5.4
TOTAL	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

TABLE - 31
WOMEN PROVOKE SEXUAL ASSAULTS FROM MEN (percentage)

RESPONSIBILITY	B	E	P	V	TOTAL
Fully responsible	15.4	2.9	9.6	16.6	6.8
Partly responsible	59.8	65.4	71.5	64.9	64.5
Not responsible	19.9	25.6	14.5	10.7	22.9
No response	4.9	6.1	4.4	7.8	5.8
TOTAL	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

TABLE - 32
SINS AGAINST CHASTITY (percentage)

GRIEVOUSNESS	B	E	P	V	TOTAL
More grievous	17.3	43.2	10.0	20.5	34.2
Equally grievous	74.3	48.6	78.3	62.9	56.9
Less grievous	5.8	3.6	8.0	9.3	4.7
No response	2.6	4.5	3.6	7.3	4.2
TOTAL	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

TABLE - 33
KNOWLEDGE OF FAMILY-PLANNING METHODS (percentage)

KNOWLEDGE	B	E	P	V	TOTAL
No knowledge	18.2	30.4	15.3	28.3	26.6
Low	28.3	20.4	22.9	28.8	22.7
Moderate	17.2	13.5	13.7	10.7	14.2
High	36.3	35.7	48.2	32.2	36.4
TOTAL	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

TABLE - 34
ADVICE ON FAMILY-PLANNING METHODS (percentage)

ADVICE	B	E	P	V	TOTAL
Never advise	43.3	44.1	30.9	32.7	42.6
Advise only NFP	46.8	49.0	47.8	58.0	48.9
Advise all methods	10.0	16.9	21.3	9.3	8.6
TOTAL	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

TABLE - 35
STAND ON CONDITIONAL ABORTION
(percentage)

AGREEMENT	B	E	P	V	TOTAL
No	60.4	88.6	51.0	53.7	78.2
Yes	33.2	5.3	42.6	31.7	15.2
No response	6.4	6.1	6.4	14.6	6.6
TOTAL	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

TABLE - 36
HELP TO RAPE VICTIM
(percentage)

NATURE OF HELP	B	E	P	V	TOTAL
Do not know	10.5	5.4	10.1	4.9	6.8
Refer to experts	58.1	80.6	49.2	73.2	73.2
Direct involvement	27.7	8.3	37.5	15.6	14.8
No response	3.8	5.7	3.2	6.3	5.1
TOTAL	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

One can find that in the practice of health habits the majority of the members in the four dioceses are somewhat regular, and Patna has a higher proportion of those who are very regular. In the same way, a higher proportion of the members see the menstrual cycle as a burden to some extent. More members in Bombay and Ernakulam do not see it as a burden. Most of the members hold women fully or partly responsible in provoking men sexually.

Nearly 43 per cent in Ernakulam see the sin against chastity as more grievous than sins against other vows. It was said by some in the group discussion that religious who fail in keeping the vow of chastity are easily sent away. There is no spirit of forgiveness or attempt to rehabilitate her. Failures against other vows are easily tolerated. It was felt that such discrepancy should be questioned. Nearly half of the members in all the four dioceses have a low level of knowledge or none at all, regarding family-planning methods. Those who advise women on family-planning, do so only on the natural family-planning method. A considerable proportion avoid giving such advice to women. It was also shared in the group discussions that religious, because of their celibate way of life, did not understand the various problems faced by married women and therefore they preferred not to interfere in this matter. Patna seems to stand high on advising people about all methods of family-planning. In the same diocese a higher proportion take a definite pro-

stand for conditional abortion for women who conceive in inadvertent circumstance beyond their control. They are also more ready to get involved directly in helping rape victims, while the majority in the other dioceses refer such cases to outside experts. There is a sharp contrast between Patna and Ernakulam on the question of family-planning conditional abortion, and rape. Ernakulam tends rather to take a negative stand or non involvement in these issues. Could it be that a longer period of Church tradition in Ernakulam prevents the members from approaching these issues in a different light? Does the "mission" character of Patna diocese necessitate that some of the members see these problems from a perspective other than the teachings of the Church? These issues have to be studied further.

How far does the ideological thinking influence the practices related to the sexuality of women? The following table illustrates the level of correlation between ideological positions and practices related to the sexuality of women:

TABLE - 37
IDEOLOGY AND SEXUALITY: (correlation values)

SEXUALITY	B	E	P	V	TOTAL
Health habits	.1936**	.3874**	.3731**	.5510**	.3797**
Sins against chastity	.2704**	.2526**	.3212**	.3142**	.3108**
Women do not provoke men	.2122**	.2599**	.2739**	.3808**	.2053**
Know of F-P. Methods	.2966**	.2525**	.4087**	.0744**	.2598**
Advice F-P. Methods	.1796**	.1872**	.2858**	.2760**	.2103**
Menstruation	.0908*	.2179**	.1793*	.2456**	.2186**
Help Rape Victim	.1902**	.2350**	.1306	.3150**	.2486**
Conditional Abortion	.1861**	.2109**	.2970**	.2877**	.2645**

Notes: *.01 Significance **.001 high significance.

Under the influence of ideology, one can see higher correlation values with high significance mostly in the Patna and Vijayawada dioceses. Those who have stronger egalitarian ideology in these dioceses are comparatively more inclined to see the practices related to sexuality in a different light, contrary to the patriarchal views of the Church. Whether or not the nature of mission in these dioceses influences these factors has to be explored.

Discrimination

The experience of discrimination is more region-based than caste-based. This could be due to the higher prevalence of regional diversity than caste diversity, in the dioceses of Bombay, Patna, and Vijayawada.

It is also very significant to note that the differences/discriminations based on region, caste, sex, appear to be more common in religious congregations in these dioceses. Such instances are very high in Ernakulam.

TABLE - 38
SOCIAL DISCRIMINATION (percentage)

PLACE	B	E	P	V	TOTAL
Not experienced	47.8	40.4	43.4	61.4	43.3
Secular institutions	9.6	2.3	10.8	7.8	4.8
Church institutions	7.2	4.4	11.2	5.4	5.5
Religious institutions	35.4	52.9	34.5	25.4	45.4
TOTAL	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Opinions on the entry of dalits into religious congregations vary from diocese to diocese. Ernakulam ranks very high among those who are not open (48.2 per cent).

TABLE - 39
ENTRY OF SC/ST MEMBERS IN THE CONGREGATION (percentage)

OPENNESS	B	E	P	V	TOTAL
Not open	11.1	48.2	3.2	7.3	35.0
Somewhat open	43.5	41.7	48.2	26.8	41.8
Very open	41.1	4.8	48.2	62.4	18.6
No response	4.4	5.2	0.4	3.4	4.7
TOTAL	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Among those who are very open Vijayawada seems to feature high. Yet the proportion of SC/ST members in this diocese is very low (2 per cent). On the other hand the Patna diocese with a higher population of dalits (16.1 per cent), seems to be divided in its opinion. Ernakulam is generally not very open. Bombay too is somewhat divided and it has about 5 per cent dalit membership. One wonders whether any explanation is possible for such a varied situation in the dioceses. In the group discussions (first stage of the study) several explanations came up regarding why religious formation for dalit sisters is more difficult. These explanations were grouped together as the predominant practice of Western culture in most of the institutions: discriminating treatment given to dalit members (e.g., they are asked to do physically harder work by superiors or not allowed to relate with outsiders easily, as they seemed to lack maturity and cultural behaviour); the dalits' own inferiority complex and their inadequate faith formation. The members were questioned as to which of these explanations corresponded more to the reduced entry of dalits into religious congregations. The responses are given in the following table.

TABLE - 40

OBSTACLES IN DALIT'S ENTRY (percentage)

OBSTACLES	B	E	P	V	TOTAL
Practice of Western culture	15.6	2.6	5.6	11.2	6.3
Culture discrimination	8.9	14.2	4.0	5.9	12.0
Inferiority complex	34.3	48.8	46.6	29.3	44.4
Inadequate faith formation	30.9	29.2	35.3	41.5	30.6
No Response	10.1	5.2	6.4	12.2	6.8
TOTAL	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Most of the members in Bombay, Ernakulam, and Patna, answered that the inferiority complex of dalits was the major obstacle. The second major reason given is their inadequate faith formation. It was said that this factor affects the perserverance of the religious in the religious vocation.

"Once they receive higher educational status they often opt out of religious life"—remarked some sisters in the group discussion. This may throw some light on the negative correlation between the ideological stand of the Patna members and their perception of dalit entry into religious life ($r = -.0578$). In spite of their egalitarian stand some members in Patna do not favour dalit entry into a religious congregation very easily. The experience of discrimination mostly in religious institutions by some members also somewhat supports the above analysis. This issue has to be explored and studied further.

HIGHLIGHTS OF THE STUDY AND EMERGING ISSUES

Socio-cultural Factors and Ideology

The egalitarian ideological stand seems to be influenced by factors such as higher age, longer experience in religious life, the pontifical nature of the congregation and its geographical extension, theological training, and membership in significant bodies of the Church (specially at diocesan, national, and international levels). These factors vary from diocese to diocese.

Factors which influence are:

Bombay

Longer experience in religious life, theological training, pontifical and international character of the congregation.

Ernakulam

Higher age, experience in religious life, theological training, pontifical and international character of the congregation, educational status, and membership in significant bodies of the Church.

Patna

Higher age, theological training, educational status, and membership in significant bodies of the Church.

Vijayawada

Higher age, experience in religious life, geographical spread of the congregation and membership in significant bodies of the Church.

Issues:

- * Do congregations value experience and age while admitting candidates?
- * From where does the ideological (egalitarian) thinking of the members originate? From within the congregation or outside?
- * What is the nature of the theological training given to the religious in their formation?

Control on Personality

A higher proportion of members in Ernakulam suffer from low self-esteem, poor capacity for leadership, and minimum participation in decision-making. Those who stand high in these personality traits seem to be more influenced by an egalitarian ideology. Caste and self-esteem are highly correlated in Patna and Ernakulam. Geographical spread seems to be an influential factor for enhanced personality traits in Vijayawada and Ernakulam. High positions held in the congregation appear to affect personality in Bombay, Ernakulam, and Patna.

Issues:

- * What could be done to improve the self esteem of the SC/ST members in the congregation?
- * Do members find sufficient opportunities to hold decision-making positions in religious institutions?
- * The geographical spread of the congregation seems to have a direct correlation with an egalitarian ideology as well as with personality traits. Does a wider geographical spread mean greater freedom in thinking and better opportunity to develop one's personality traits?
- * Similarly in Ernakulam the nature of the congregation (diocesan/pontifical) is a factor that influences ideology and personality. Could it be that diocesan congregations are more controlled in their thinking? From where is this control exercised? How?
- * What are the elements in diocesan and pontifical congregations that affect the personality development of the individuals?

Control on Spirituality

The struggle for justice with the oppressed seemed to be a predominant dimension of spirituality in the minds of the members. Service and human relationships are emphasised as the most relevant components of religious life by a high proportion of them. The concept of option for the poor is also described as service by most in the groups.

The findings in Ernakulam are somewhat different from the above-mentioned trends. They prefer a theological / reflective spirituality, describe the option for the poor as struggle for justice and yet more than half opt for the service dimension as the most relevant component of their religious life. Ernakulam along with Bombay, cater mostly to the higher-income groups whereas Patna and Vijayawada caters more to the lower-income groups. A large proportion of members in all four dioceses are not willing to miss daily Mass for the sake of ministry.

Dependence on men seems to prevail for retreats, theological reflection, and spirituality. Fundamentalism related to other religions mostly prevails in Ernakulam. However, for the majority of the members, obedience is perceived more as dialogue and listening to the prophetic call of the Spirit, while the grace of office is seen as the grace given to individuals to fulfil a mission in the Church. The ideological correlation with factors related to spirituality is high in Vijayawada diocese.

Issues:

- * Can the service dimension be connected to a liberative perspective in spirituality? Or is there a liberative perspective in the services performed by the religious in institutions/works?
- * How could considerations of socio-economic realities of our country (caste/class conflicts) be included in the formation programmes of religious spirituality?
- * Should daily Mass be obligatory in the spirituality of religious when the needs of the ministry are felt as a priority in remote rural places?
- * Is the progressive thinking on obedience and "grace of office" expressed in practice? How? What are the obstacles for these expressions?
- * Though egalitarian views seem to influence spirituality, this influence is seen in lesser proportion of members as compared to the higher proportion of egalitarians in the study. When thinking goes ahead, practice seems to lag behind. What are the reasons for such a lag? Is it in the structures that one is a part of or is it internalisation of values?
- * How to integrate what one believes in, feel for, and lives out?

Control on Involvement in Political Action

The involvement of religious women in political action is resisted by the majority in Ernakulam. On the other hand, the majority in other dioceses support it. But all of them

affirm that they get only limited support from Church structures in such involvement. Greater ideological influence on political action is seen in Vijayawada and Bombay.

Issues:

- * What is the exact nature of support or resistance from Church structures that the members experience?
- * Does the negative stand (non-support) taken by Ernakulam have anything to do with the political party influence highly prevalent in Kerala?
- * Do all those who want to get involved in political action have an ideological/theoretical base to support this involvement?
- * How well versed are religious in various dimensions of political actions, political stand, articulations of it in actions?

Control on Women's Struggle in the Church

Support for women's struggle within the Church also receives a similar response as that of women in political action. The dioceses of Bombay, Patna, and Vijayawada support this very much and Ernakulam only to a certain extent (39 per cent). However, those who do support seem to be motivated by their egalitarian ideological stand. Their correlation value is somewhat higher with high significance. The next comes Vijayawada. Once again practice seems to lag behind the ideological stand as all those who stand for egalitarian views ideologically, do not support women's struggle within the Church. This support seems to come from a limited proportion of members.

Issues:

- * What are the reasons for such a gap between these two factors: egalitarian ideology and support to women's struggle within the Church?
- * Within the Church structures, what are the experiences of those who do support this struggle with their ideological background?
- * How do they deal with the non-supportive attitude of the majority? Does such a struggle receive enough support and encouragement within religious institutions?

Control on Women's Work in Church-related Institutions

In the opinion of members a higher proportion choose regular salary for work done in institutions as clerks, receptionists, secretaries, social workers, health workers, etc. The next demand for regular salary is for housework and lastly for pastoral/catechetical work. Ernakulam appears to be highly resistant to remuneration for pastoral work.

Issues:

- * Should these three types of work done by women in Church-related institutions be computed in monetary terms? Why?

- * Why is the value of productivity (in monetary terms) given more to work in institutions than to housework or pastoral work?
- * What is the general capacity of local churches to pay for these works with regular salary?
- * Should women religious be employed for housework in Church-related institutions? If so, what should be the remuneration?
- * An ideologically-significant higher correlation is observed with Patna demanding regular salary for housework and pastoral work. For institutional work the significant higher correlation is found in Vijayawada. What is the ideological thinking of Bombay and Ernakulam on this issue?
- * What would enable women religious to lend dignity to their work (worth for remuneration)?
- * Whether the option of not accepting salary for work emerges from a conscious and informed manner?

Control on Physical Mobility

Dependence on an escort/companion for travelling is more evident in Ernakulam diocese. A higher proportion in Patna is less dependent on escorts/companions for travelling. This seems to be influenced to a great extent by the egalitarian ideological stand of the members in Patna.

Issues:

- * Bombay has a high proportion (45 per cent) of members who travel alone most of the time. But they do not appear to do this because of a stronger influence of ideology. Does this mean that it is more the urban culture that necessitates independent physical mobility rather than conscious ideological thinking?
- * For those who do take an escort/companion in spite of their egalitarian ideological thinking (Ernakulam and Vijayawada), are there any other social reasons that necessitate such practices?

Control on Social Mobility

Mobility to higher positions in Church structures are much favoured by Patna and Bombay. In Vijayawada more than half of the members favour it highly. Opposition by a majority can be seen in Ernakulam. Higher ideological correlation with high significance can be observed in Patna and Vijayawada specially for positions beyond Eucharistic ministers. Such a relationship is low in Bombay. In actuality positions beyond sacristan are of less occurrence compared to cooks/sacristans.

Issues:

- * The ideological stand does not seem to be a definite factor of influence in the case of favourability towards women's social mobility in Bombay, even though a higher

proportion of members here find women in leadership positions (Parish Council Office, BCC leaders, etc.) Is this trend in Bombay related to its urban culture (where women increasingly take leadership positions)?

- * Dioceses like Vijayawada and Patna greatly favour mobility of women in Church structures. What are the reasons for this? What are the actual positions held by women in these dioceses?
- * Do we need a Church with its strictly-defined hierarchical structures? Can we think of steps to create alternative Church structures which foster equality for women and men in the true spirit of the Gospel?

Control on Sexuality

Most of the members are more or less regular in the practice of health habits and body care. The menstrual cycle is seen as a burden for women at least to a certain extent by the majority. A large number consider women partly or fully responsible in provoking men sexually. A high proportion in Ernakulam (43 per cent) tends to see sins against chastity more grievous than sins against other vows. More than half of the members in Ernakulam and Vijayawada do not have adequate knowledge of family-planning methods. A considerable proportion in all four dioceses do not advise any one of family-planning methods. A more or less equal proportion advises only natural family-planning methods. Very few are willing to give advice on all methods. The majority in Bombay and Ernakulam do not support conditional abortion for women in distress. Such resistance is somewhat less in Patna and Vijayawada. Most of the participants would prefer to refer rape victims to experts and not get involved in the matter. More than anywhere else, members in Patna would get involved in helping rape victims. Very significantly, in Patna and Vijayawada ideology seems to be a factor influencing practices connected to sexuality. They have higher correlation with the significance of .001.

Issues:

- * In what ways do religious see menstruation as burdensome in their life? From where do these ideas originate?
- * Why should the vow of chastity take precedence over other vows for religious?
- * Do religious need to inform themselves adequately on family-planning methods? Why?
- * Is it necessary to advise the faithful on all methods?
- * What are the experiences of those who promote natural family-planning method in a specific way?
- * Why do dioceses like Patna and Vijayawada give more support to conditional abortion for women? Is it related to their mission experiences as they work more in rural areas and among the lower-income groups, which is not the case in Bombay and Ernakulam?

- * Why do religious refer rape victims to other experts and why are they not willing to get involved directly? Is it due to inadequacy of legal knowledge? Do the authorities discourage such involvement because of the legal hassles?
- * What specific features in Patna and Vijayawada lead to greater ideological influence as regards sexuality of women?
- * In what ways do women hold responsibility in provoking men sexually?
- * Are women religious by and large sexually victimised by priests and other Church authorities? What kind of recourse is available for them?
- * How can the religious women integrate relationships with the opposite sex into their religious life in a healthy manner?

Discrimination

Discrimination related to region is more common than caste-related discrimination. A higher proportion says that religious institutions are places where discrimination is experienced the most. Nearly half in Ernakulam (48.2 per cent) say that their congregations are not open to dalits. There seems to be no SC/ST members in the diocese of Ernakulam. Patna which has the higher proportion of dalits (16.2 per cent) seems to be divided on the opinion of dalit entry into religious congregations; some of its members who are ideologically egalitarian tend to be negative on this issue. Vijayawada seems to be very open; but their actual proportion of dalit population is only two per cent. Bombay has four per cent dalit sisters and they too are somewhat divided in their opinion. As the major obstacle for the entry of dalits, a higher proportion mentions the inferiority complex of dalit sisters. The next obstacle seems to be their inadequate faith formation.

Issues:

- * Is the predominance of Syrian Christianity in Ernakulam directly related to the anti-dalit stand of the congregations?
 - * Patna which has a considerable number of dalit sisters, is somewhat divided in its opinion on dalit entry. Is it due to their past experiences? If so, what are these experiences?
- If inadequate faith formation is the major obstacle, what factors are responsible for such a poor faith formation for dalits? Are these factors related to religion alone or are there other social factors?
- * The inferiority complex is related to self-esteem which in turn is affected by the caste factor as mentioned earlier. What are the measures taken by the congregations to solve these problems?
 - * Even though a higher proportion in Vijayawada see their congregation very open to dalit entry, still the actual proportion is only two per cent. What are the reasons for this?

It can be concluded that the experiences of religious in the patriarchal structures of the Church vary from place to place according to the culture, stage of socio-economic and political development, historicity, and dependence on Church authorities.

These variations should have been further explored in order to gain insight into how patriarchy operates in religious structures. At the same time, the dawn of liberation is awakening in the minds of many religious too. This Workshop will be of great value for those who dream of a Church where women participate actively not only in shaping its history but also realise the plan of salvation and restore humanness to all the people of God.

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STUDY ON WOMEN AND RELIGION

QUESTIONNAIRE

Sch. No. Diocese Name of the Congregation

Please encircle the appropriate answer for each question.

1. Age of the respondent: Code

Up to 25 Years	1
26 - 35 Years	2
36 - 45 Years	3
46 - 60 Years	4
61 - 75 Years	5
76 and above	6

2. Present Educational Status:

Secondary	1
Higher secondary	2
Graduation	3
Post-Graduation	4
Professional Diploma/Degree	5
Ph. D.	6

3. Educational status before joining religious life:

Secondary	1
Higher Secondary	2
Graduation	3
Post-Graduation	4
Professional Diploma/Degree	5
Ph. D.	6

4. What profession do you practise at present?

Teacher	1
Secretarial	
(Clerical, receptionist, accounts)	2
Catechist	3
Social Worker/ Activist	4
Medical	5
Home Maintenance	6
Formation/Governance	7
Student	8

5. Which state in India do you originate from? (Please tick Code No.9, if you are a foreigner)
- | | |
|-------------------|---|
| Andhra Pradesh | 1 |
| Bihar | 2 |
| Gujarat | 3 |
| Karnataka | 4 |
| Kerala | 5 |
| Maharashtra/Goa | 6 |
| M.P./U.P./ Orissa | 7 |
| North East | 8 |
| Tamil nadu | 0 |
| Not Applicable | 9 |
6. To which rite do you belong at birth?
- | | |
|----------------|---|
| Latin rite | 1 |
| Syro-Malabar | 2 |
| Syro-Malankara | 3 |
7. To which rite do you belong at present?
- | | |
|----------------|---|
| Latin rite | 1 |
| Syro-Malabar | 2 |
| Syro-Malankara | 3 |
8. To which category of caste do you belong? (Please tick Code No. 9, if you are a foreigner)
- | | |
|-----------------------|---|
| Forward Castes | 1 |
| Backward Castes | 2 |
| Other Backward Castes | 3 |
| Scheduled Castes | 4 |
| Scheduled Tribes | 5 |
| Do not know | 6 |
| Not applicable | 9 |
9. What is the nature of your Religious Congregation?
- | | |
|------------|---|
| Diocesan | 1 |
| Pontifical | 2 |
10. What is the geographical spread of your congregation?
- | | |
|--------------------|---|
| Local Diocese only | 1 |
| Within the State | 2 |
| National | 3 |
| International | 4 |

11. Including your Novitiate period, how many years have you lived as a Religious?

Less than 5 Years	1
6 - 10 Years	2
11 - 20 Years	3
21 - 30 Years	4
31 - 40 Years	5
41 and above	6

12. What is your present position in the Religious Congregation?

Ordinary member	1
Head of Institution/Centre	2
Superior	3
Provincial/Provincial Councillor	4
General/General Councillor	5

13. What kind of formal (theological/scriptural) training have you undergone?

None	1
Certificate Course	2
B.Th/Equivalent	3
M.Th/Equivalent	4
Ph.D.	5

10. Where do you work at present?

Institution/work governed by religious congregation	1
Institution/work governed by diocesan authorities	2
Institution/work governed by secular groups	3

15. Have you held any membership in the significant committees of the Church?

None	1
Parish level	2
Diocesan level	3
State level	4
National level	5
International level	6

16. Please encircle any one against each of the statements given below:

	Always	Often	Some- times	Seldom	Never
a. I don't take pride in being a woman.	5	4	3	2	1
b. I am respected as a woman by my own family.	5	4	3	2	1
c. I am comfortable with myself.	5	4	3	2	1
d. I am appreciated as a woman by others who are significant in my life.	5	4	3	2	1
e. My work does not provide me with a sense of achievement in life.	5	4	3	2	1
f. My religious life helps me to esteem my womanhood.	5	4	3	2	1
g. I make up my mind independent of other people's opinion.	5	4	3	2	1
h. I don't express my opinion freely if it is controversial.	5	4	3	2	1
i. I take time off to read, reflect, and form opinion on issues important in life.	5	4	3	2	1
j. The structures around me are not conducive for my own reflective thinking.	5	4	3	2	1
k. I fulfil faithfully the responsibilities assigned to me.	5	4	3	2	1
l. I don't take initiative to lead community prayer/celebration/meetings.	5	4	3	2	1
m. I initiate change in the works of apostolate wherever necessary.	5	4	3	2	1
n. I take initiative to tackle human-rights issues affecting my area.	5	4	3	2	1
o. I can't stand alone in support of a just cause even when there is no support from my community.	5	4	3	2	1

p. I could not take decisions in my family on matters related to me.	5	4	3	2	1
q. I am actively involved in decisions affecting me.	5	4	3	2	1
r. I am not actively involved in decisions affecting community life.	5	4	3	2	1
s. I am not actively involved in decisions of my apostolic life.	5	4	3	2	1
t. I participate actively in decisions related to province/congregation.	5	4	3	2	1
u. I don't participate in decisions related to local church/parish/diocese.	5	4	3	2	1

17. Do you agree with the following statements?

	Agree	Partially agree	Disagree
a. Religious formation has increased my capacity for decision-making.	3	2	1
b. I could make responsible decisions even before I entered religious life.	3	2	1
c. Religious formation has reduced my decision-making capacity.	3	2	1

18. My understanding of the vow of obedience is:

a. To obey after a dialogue with my superiors.	1
b. To respond to the prophetic call of the spirit, whatever be the cost to self.	2
c. To obey blindly the will of my superiors.	3
d. To obey the collective will of the community.	4

19. Does your present educational qualification give you a sense of self-worth in life?

Not at all	1
To some extent	2
To great extent	3

20. Do you feel the theological formation that you have received is adequate for your life as a religious?
- | | |
|-----------------|---|
| Not at all | 1 |
| To some extent | 2 |
| To great extent | 3 |
21. Do you agree that religious women are being more controlled in the use of material resources/assets than religious men?
- | | |
|-----------------|---|
| Not at all | 1 |
| To some extent | 2 |
| To great extent | 3 |
22. Have you experienced any differences/discriminations on the basis of the region that you hail from?
- | | |
|-----------------|---|
| Not at all | 1 |
| To some extent | 2 |
| To great extent | 3 |
23. Have you experienced any differences/discriminations on the basis of the caste that you belong to?
- | | |
|-----------------|---|
| Not at all | 1 |
| To some extent | 2 |
| To great extent | 3 |
24. Where have you experienced differences/discrimination the most in your life?
- | | |
|-------------------------|---|
| Among secular groups | 1 |
| Among church groups | 2 |
| Among religious sisters | 3 |
| Not experienced | 4 |
25. Do you consider your religious congregation open enough for the entry of dalit girls?
- | | |
|---------------|---|
| Not open | 1 |
| Somewhat open | 2 |
| Very open | 3 |

26. What do you consider to be the major obstacle for dalit girls to enter into religious life? (Tick only ONE relevant answer according to your perception)
- | | |
|--|---|
| Religious life is highly Westernised | 1 |
| Discrimination of dalits in religious institutions | 2 |
| Dalits have inferiority complex | 3 |
| Dalits' faith formation is inadequate | 4 |
27. What is the socio-economic status of the groups/people whom you serve mostly at present ?
- | | |
|--------------------|---|
| Upper class | 1 |
| Upper middle class | 2 |
| Middle class | 3 |
| Lower middle class | 4 |
| Lower Class | 5 |
| None | 6 |
28. What type of group have you opted to serve at present? (Circle only one)
- | | |
|---------------------------|---|
| Not opted | 1 |
| Poor in general | 2 |
| Special option for dalits | 3 |
| Special option for women | 4 |
| None | 5 |
29. What is your concept of the option for/with the poor? (Circle only ONE answer which is closest to your understanding)
- | | |
|--|---|
| a. Nothing in particular | 1 |
| b. Option by joining in their struggle for justice | 2 |
| c. Option exercised through prayer and sacrifice | 3 |
| d. Option exercised through service
(education, health and development, etc.) | 4 |
| e. Option exercised by teaching the upper
class to be more just towards the poor. | 5 |

30. Is baptism essential in order to evangelise the people of other faiths?
- | | |
|----------------------|---|
| Not essential | 1 |
| Somewhat essential | 2 |
| Absolutely essential | 3 |
31. Do you participate in the religious functions/ceremonies of other faiths?
- | | |
|--------------|---|
| Never | 1 |
| Occasionally | 2 |
| Often | 3 |
32. Do you encourage inter-religious marriages even without the conversion of either of the parties?
- | | |
|-------------|---|
| Discourage | 1 |
| Indifferent | 2 |
| Encourage | 3 |
33. Do you favour the involvement of religious women in political action/mobilisation of people for social justice?
- | | |
|-----|---|
| No | 1 |
| Yes | 2 |
34. Do you favour the organisation and mobilisation of women within the Church to struggle for their rights?
- | | |
|-----|---|
| No | 1 |
| Yes | 2 |
35. In your opinion, how far do religious women receive support from their religious/Church authorities in their struggle for social justice?
- | | |
|-----------------|---|
| Not at all | 1 |
| To some extent | 2 |
| To great extent | 3 |
36. Do you travel to other places with an escort/companion?
- | | |
|-----------|---|
| Never | 1 |
| Seldom | 2 |
| Sometimes | 3 |
| Often | 4 |
| Always | 5 |

37. Do you agree that trained women can occupy the following positions in the Church?

	Agree	Disagree
a. Cleaning/Cooking/Maintenance	1	2
b. Sacristan	1	2
c. Para-liturgist	1	2
d. Ministers of the Eucharist	1	2
e. Office bearers in Parish/Diocesan councils	1	2
f. Women deacons	1	2
g. Priest/Bishop	1	2
h. Director of Diocesan Societies/Diocesan procurators	1	2
i. Member of priests' senate	1	2
j. Marriage-tribunal judge	1	2
k. Diocesan Chancellor	1	2

38. How far do religious women occupy the following positions in your parish/diocese?

	Not at all	To some extent	To great extent
a. Cleaner/Cook/Maintenance	1	2	3
b. Sacristan	1	2	3
c. Para-liturgist	1	2	3
d. Ministers of the Eucharist	1	2	3
e. Office bearers in Parish/Diocesan councils	1	2	3
f. Leaders of B.C.C. Groups	1	2	3

39. To which spirituality do you feel inclined towards in your life at present (Tick any one, most relevant to you)

- | | |
|--|---|
| a. Affective spirituality.
(Devotional practices and pious activities, penance, spread of devotions, etc.) | 1 |
| b. Theological Spirituality
(Reflection/study/work related to dogmas on Jesus Christ, Our Lady, Trinity, etc.) | 2 |
| c. Liberative Spirituality.
(Participation in the struggle of the oppressed keeping the model of Jesus/Mary as the symbol/model for liberation of the poor/women) | 3 |

40. Among the various components of religious life given below, identify one that is most relevant to your way of life:
- Intimacy with Christ in solitude, prayer and life of penance. 1
 - Intimacy with Christ through involvements in human-rights issues in the locality. 2
 - Intimacy with Christ in human relationships and service to the needy. 3
41. Would you forgo the daily celebration of the Eucharist in view of demands in your ministry?
- Never 1
 - Occasionally 2
 - Often 3
42. In the absence of a priest in the locality, would you consider it appropriate for a woman minister to celebrate sacraments in the Christian Community?
- Not appropriate 1
 - Appropriate 2
43. Among the following statements which one is closest to your understanding of the "grace of office"?
- It is bestowed exclusively on those who govern the congregation and its works 1
 - It is given to each individual for the fulfilment of her mission in the Church 2
 - It is a corporate grace given to all to carry on community mission 3
44. How far have you used your Theological/Scriptural expertise/insights in the field?
- | | Great Extent | Some Extent | Never |
|---|--------------|-------------|-------|
| a. Organising courses | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| b. Preaching retreats/recollections | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| c. Talks/discussions | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| d. Contribution to theological journals | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| e. Contribution to local news papers | 1 | 2 | 3 |

45. What kind of remuneration do you favour for religious women performing the following works in the Church-related institutions?

	No remuneration	Honorarium	Regular Salary (Irrespective of any other benefits)
a. House-related work	1	2	3
b. Catechetical/Pastoral work	1	2	3
c. Institution work (Teacher, clerk, receptionist, social worker, nurse, etc.)	1	2	3

46. Do you follow the following health habits?

	Daily	Some-times	Never
a. Physical exercise	1	2	3
b. Yoga exercise	1	2	3
c. Balanced diet	1	2	3
d. Self-examination of body	1	2	3
e. Recreative activities	1	2	3

47. Is the menstrual cycle of the body a burden to women?

Never	1
Sometimes	2
Always	3

48. What was the principle source from which you came to know the facts of life?

Family	1
Friends	2
School/Parish	3
Books	4
Religious formation	5

49. Are religious women themselves responsible for provoking sexual assaults/advances from men?
- | | |
|--------------------|---|
| Fully responsible | 1 |
| Partly responsible | 2 |
| Not responsible | 3 |
50. How do you consider the sins against the vow of chastity?
- | | |
|------------------------------------|---|
| a. More greivous than other vows? | 1 |
| b. Equally greivous as other vows? | 2 |
| c. Less greivous than other vows? | 3 |
51. Which family-planning methods are known to you?
- | | No | Yes |
|--------------------------|----|-----|
| a. Rhythm method | 1 | 2 |
| b. Ovulation | 1 | 2 |
| c. Oral pills | 1 | 2 |
| d. Intra-uterine devices | 1 | 2 |
| e. Sterilisation | 1 | 2 |
| f. Condom/diaphragm | 1 | 2 |
52. Do you advise women with problems on family-planning methods ?
- | | |
|--------------------|---|
| Never advise | 1 |
| Advise only NFP | 2 |
| Advise all methods | 3 |
53. What would you do if a rape victim comes to you for help?
- | | |
|--------------------------|---|
| Do not know | 1 |
| Refer to other experts | 2 |
| Get directly involved in | 3 |
| Legal proceedings | 4 |
54. Would you consider abortion for a woman when the circumstances are inadvertant and beyond her control?
- | | |
|-----|---|
| No | 1 |
| Yes | 2 |

55. To which of the following statements do you agree? Tick only one, in each section.

- a. God is King over all the earth and He is our Almighty Father: 1

OR

God is a compassionate Mother, a caring Father and a faithful companion. 2

- b. Jesus Christ is true God and true man, Son of the Father, who came to establish the Kingdom of God on earth. 1

OR

Jesus Christ is the first person in whom both masculinity and femininity were fully integrated and reached the full maturity of human being which is divinity itself. 2

- c. The Holy Spirit is the advocate of the Church. 1

OR

The Spirit is the creative energy of the Church; She is the wisdom of God. 2

- d. The Church is represented by the Pope, Bishops, Clergy and the faithful baptised in the Church. 1

OR

The Church is represented by all kinds of people belonging to all castes, classes, gender, race, and religion, who share an equal status in Christ. 2

- e. My spiritual life is faithfulness in prayer, sacraments and fulfilment of all the duties of the state of my life to the best of my ability. 1

OR

My spiritual life is the inner core of myself, shaped by my personal encounter with God, social realities, and out of which comes my motivation and commitments. 2

- f. The human being is a royal person who can choose either to create or to destroy the world. 1

OR

The human being is a sinful and weak creature. 2

- g. In the order of creation, man represents the totality of human nature and woman, because of original sin, is subordinate to man. 1
- OR
- In the order of creation, man and woman were created equally in the likeness and image of God. Sin of domination subjected woman to man. 2
- h. Woman's role is to subject herself to her husband in all things as to the Lord, for the husband is the head of wife as Christ is the head of the Church. 1
- OR
- The role of women is to deepen and enrich the Church's own identity and mission in the world. As equals, men and women manifest Christ to the World. 2
- i. Salvation is the total liberation of the whole person, body and soul, from concrete social evils like injustice, slavery, exploitation, and oppression; it is the working towards concrete blessings like social equality, security, social harmony. 1
- OR
- Salvation is the liberation from sin that results in death and hell and therefore works towards a life of good deeds meriting heaven above. 2
- j. Religious life leads to perfection when one follows its norms and codes prescribed. 1
- OR
- Religious life is one of the ways, similar to that of Christ's life on earth, that seeks fulfilment. 2
- k. The soul loves the body and they both form the foundation for basic human existence on earth. 1
- OR
- The soul is a prisoner in the body filled with vices. The body is an obstacle in attaining union with God. 2
- l. Death is the natural event for all living creatures and it leads towards a rebirth in God. 1
- OR
- It is the wage of original sin. 2
- m. Eternal life is a life with God after the death of the body. 1
- OR
- Eternal life is the fullness of human life in God. We already experience it, but not yet. 2

A SCENARIO OF WOMEN IN MATRIARCHAL AND PATRIARCHAL SOCIETIES

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A woman's place in society is always one that is assigned to her by man. She remains in a state of bondage within a complicated cultural process that hinders man's recognition of her as a human being like himself. In order to have complete freedom and authority over society, man treats her as inferior and has conveniently substantiated his stand by branding her as weak and incapable of holding a respectable position in the social system. Thus Simone de Beauvoir has rightly said that woman is treated as the 'other' in a totality of which the two components i.e., man and woman, are necessary to each other.

An analysis of the Indian social structure reveals that our culture, tradition, and classical literature contained certain outmoded, irrational, inequitable, and irrelevant elements which determined gender-based politics. The dominance of patriarchal ideology is the root cause of all sorts of unequal treatment meted out to women. Social institutions such as family and marriage are vehicles for the dissemination of male authority and the powerlessness of the female in society.

If the history of family and marriage is taken into consideration, a good case can be made out to show that the family was originally matriarchal in structure and that women enjoyed a respectable status in those primitive societies. Later this maternal, unilateral system was overthrown by men due to their selfish interest in protecting their own needs, and retaining power for themselves. Men have used the best-known Machiavellian technique of 'divide and conquer' to dominate women. Thus people at the core of their personal lives are kept divided in their homes by gender distinction. Precisely in the area where people search for love and support, and seek a retreat from insecurity and competitiveness, they face a tangle of relationships and attitudes that too often the home itself becomes a bitter battleground.

In every stratum of human society, the status of an individual is largely determined at birth through the patrilineal or matrilineal system of heredity. On the basis of authority, i.e., the power relationship between man and woman, a family may be matriarchal or patriarchal or a combination of both. In a matriarchal family, the authority is vested in the woman who is also the head of the family, with males in a subordinate position. McLennan, Bachopen and Morgan believed that the earliest form of family was matriarchal. According to MacIver (1945: 248), in a matriarchal family, the chief characteristics are:

- a. Descent being reckoned through the mother, not through the father, because maternity is a fact while paternity is only an opinion.
- b. Marriage relations being transient and husband being sometimes merely a casual visitor;

- c. The child being brought up in the home of the wife's relations, hence here the descent is not only matriarchal but also matrilineal.
- d. The authority in the family remaining in the hands of the wife or with some representative of her kin;
- e. and finally, the property being transferred through the mother and females alone succeeding to it.

The matriarchal family in its unstructured form was prevalent among primitive hunting societies, but there was no family unit in the accepted sense of the term. Matriarchy in its formal structure is practised in many parts of the world: among North American Indians, certain tribal groups in Australia and Africa, Nairs of Kerala, Khasis and Garos in Assam. Among the Khasis family property is transmitted through the females and is held by the women alone at all times. However, the family property is indivisible. Among the Garos, the descent is matrilineal and the residence is matrilineal. Property passes through the females (but all women members do not share the family property). The parents determine one daughter as the heiress but she need not be the eldest or the youngest. In matriarchal society, as Koeing (1968:136) cites, in around 50 per cent of the tribes the biological father plays a minor role, while the real duties of the father are performed by the mother's brother, the maternal uncle. This system is followed among the Nairs of Kerala too. Thus matriarchy provides a respectable and honoured status for the woman, a legitimacy that comes with motherhood.

The most dominant family system prevalent in present-day society is the patriarchal form. Under this system the male head of the family is the possessor of all power. He is the owner and administrator of the family property and has rights over family members. The chief characteristics of the patriarchal family structure are:

- (a) the wife after marriage comes to live in the home of the husband,
- (b) the father is the supreme authority of the family property,
- (c) descent is reckoned through the father and the children are known by the name of the family of their father,
- (d) and only the male children can inherit the property of the father.

This type of family was prevalent among the Hebrews, the Greeks, the Romans, the Kariera tribe of Western Australia (Radcliffe, 1979:36), and the Aryans of India. But it has not become a universal family structure. Among the Hebrews, the eldest male member ruled absolutely and exercised almost supreme power over his dependents. When one views this principle in the Indian context, an almost complete subordination is obvious in the role of the woman, in that the woman is subject to the will of her husband. As Manu, the law-giver stated, it was the woman's duty to obey her father before marriage, her husband after marriage, and her son in her widowhood. Thus, in the patriarchal family the male descendent is the protector and ruler of the family wherein he enjoys full authority over the members.

Pure-bred strains in the patrilineal and matrilineal systems are comparatively rare. Many anthropologists agree that there was parity between the male and the female in most gathering and hunting societies. Social arrangements were such that neither matriarchal nor patriarchal superiority of the one ever posed a threat to the other. Instead, gender roles were balanced and reciprocal. The work of each sex was recognized as essential, where the conditions and products of that work were controlled by the gender of the one who carried it out. Women were not dependent on individual wage-earning men, and children were seen ultimately as the joint responsibility of husband and wife.

Balanced gender roles were equally important in the economical and social areas and in rituals too and there existed a balance among the numerous living, village, agrarian cultures. Eleanor Leacock's (1983) study on the Iroquois community of New York State and Robert Steven Grumet's (1977) observation of the North American Indian farmers, reveal a balanced gender relation maintained among them. Certain gathering and hunting societies like the Montagnais-Naskapi natives of the Labrador Peninsula (Eleanor Leacock 1983), the Mbuti of Zaire (Colin Turnbull, 1962), the Agta of the Philippines (Estioko Griffin and Bion Griffin) and some aboriginal Australian societies (Stevens, 1972) also followed egalitarian principles in gender relations. Their gender relations were balanced and reciprocal.

Women were economically independent and participated actively and vocally in the group decision-making processes, trade, and distribution. Some of the ceremonies emphasised the inter-dependence and autonomy of the sexes. Each considered the individuality of the other as a factor that was crucial and important. Among the Ovatterero of South-West Africa, a child derived membership in a matrilineal clan through his mother and through his father, a patrilineal clan (Radcliffe Brown, 1979:39). In several regions of Africa this is rationalised by a conception that every human being is compounded of two principles — in the first principle the 'blood' is derived from the mother and in the second, the 'spirit' is derived from the father. Consequently the combination of both seems to be the most desirable and acceptable of gender relations for the development of their societies.

ORIGIN OF MATRIARCHY

The origin of the institutions of patrilineal and matrilineal succession is historical. The historical origin of any system is a series of unique events which extend often over long periods of gradual growth. There is evidence that there had once been a stage where woman occupied a prestigious position in society, but is now occupied by man. Classical literature and myth could be considered evidence because both were written within historical contexts and therefore incorporated actual customs; besides, texts could be interpreted to suit certain hidden preoccupations.

One of the areas of concern for 19th-century social evolutionists was the historical primacy of the matrilineal kinship system which traces descent only through the mother's blood line. Writers like Johann Bachofen, John Mchennan, John Lubbock, Lewis Henry Morgan, and R. Briffault have argued that the earliest stages of human social life were characterised by sexual promiscuity and lack of control over sexuality. People did not have any stable

or definite marital relationships between them. Briffault say that the earliest human family consisted of a mother and her children.

Anthropological analysis of the nomadic period reveals that childbirth was accidental in nature. Childbirth or fertility of a woman was not given any importance. The primitive hordes had no permanence with regard to property or territory, and hence set no store by posterity. Children were not considered prized possessions but seen more as a burden for the elders. Therefore infanticide was common among the people. Those women who gave birth did not know the pride of creation. Later, man settled down to agriculture and started the formation of 'class'. In order to perpetuate the numerical strength of the clan members, they began to give importance to childbirth and child-rearing. Many people were ignorant of the part played by the father in procreation. They regarded children as the reincarnation of ancestral spirits which hovered over certain trees or rocks, in certain sacred places, and they assumed that it was these which came down and entered the bodies of women. Pregnancy and childbirth were seen as mystic by nature and hence it was rarely a prerogative of the man.

The mother was obviously necessary for the birth of the child. It was she who protected and nourished the embryo within her body and it was through her body that the life of the clan in the world was propagated. Since women in such early societies had sexual intercourse with more than one man, no one could be certain of a child's paternity. Descent could be traced only through the female line. Matrilineality automatically gave rise to matriarchy (O'Kelly 1980:5). Very often the children who belonged to their mother's clan, carried the name of her clan and shared the clan's rights and privileges. Communal property was handed down by the woman. In a mystic sense the earth belonged to the woman. The link between woman and land was more strong than that suggested by ownership. For, the matrilineal regime was characterised by a veritable assimilation of woman to the earth. The productive capacity of the woman and of the earth was marvelled at by man. All of nature seemed to him like a mother. And it was believed that women, too, possessed the same dark powers as the earth. Since woman was able to summon ancestral spirits into her body, the earth was also considered to have the power to cause fruits and grain to spring up from the planted fields. Children and crops were considered as gifts of the gods. Later, domestic industry was developed. It was the woman's domain and she was in charge of barter and trade. Through her the life of the clan was maintained, and all the prosperity of the clan depended on her labour and magic powers. Such powers inspired in man a respect mingled with fear and this was reflected in his worship. Later, there was the appearance of feminine divinities (goddesses) through whom fecundity was worshipped. Woman was looked upon as a magician or a sorceress because of the power she held. These facts have led to the supposition that in primitive times a veritable reign of the woman existed — the rule of matriarchy. But in truth the golden age of woman remains only a myth.

ORIGIN OF PATRIARCHY

Transformation from matriarchy to patriarchy marked the defeat in history of the female sex. The development of patriarchy was traced through the proposition made by Engels

in "The Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State". He was significantly influenced by the works of anthropologists. In the earlier period the division of labour was constituted in the perfect way where man and woman participated equally in the production process. It was the advance from stone to bronze that enabled man through his labour to gain mastery of the soil and thereby himself gain ascendance. He resisted the practice of matrilineal inheritance, found it natural for the male to want to pass his property on to his sons rather than to his sister's children. To this extent, therefore, male violated the matrilineal principle. By passing their cattle on to their children, they weakened the matrilineal clan. Furthermore, the power to buy and control the labour of others, obtained from private wealth given or granted to a few, undermined the egalitarian communal society. And this led to the development of a state with its law enforcement, armed forces, judicial systems and other devices designed to protect the private wealth of the few, male, property holders. The most important turning point in history was the passage from community ownership to private ownership.

Chastity and monogamy were enforced on women to ensure definite paternity of the male heirs. But sexual freedom was allowed to males wealthy enough to buy or support several wives or to buy the sexual favours of unattached women. Engels held the view that the economic dependence of women forced them to sell themselves whether as wives or as whores. Thus women became just another form of private property and men claimed ownership over them.

It was understood that women's oppression originated from the division of labour between the sexes. Later it developed into the growth of capitalism and the bourgeois family. Engels stated that the first antagonism that appeared in the history of humanity was the antagonism between man and woman. In a bourgeois family the husband was the patriarchal head and the wife was considered a 'slave' to him. Men were corrupt and women were exploited by these men. Thus according to Engels, male ownership of private property made them consider themselves as superior beings, and women were forced to remain in the domestic sphere and work within its confines. A woman's work within the house was considered insignificant when compared to man's productive labour. Therefore, patriarchal society degraded woman to the lowest level possible.

The transition from mother-right to father-right had its own history. Rosalind Coward (1983:112) asserts that major determinants of this transition were a combination of psychologistic assumptions about paternal interests and a history of accumulation of wealth with the development of agriculture and the concomitant emergence of private property.

REVIEW OF SOCIAL-CONTRACT THEORIES

The above discussions have indicated that the family and marriage were the two important social institutions which necessitated or promoted authority or power politics between the sexes. In this context it is relevant to highlight the contribution of various thinkers with regard to the origin of political power within the family. The social-contract theory of government espoused in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries was symptomatic

of an important shift in attitude towards authority. Society and its institutions were not entirely natural and were to a certain extent arbitrary. Patriarchal authority in its civic and familial form was questioned. Hobbes was in the forefront of this rejection of paternalism. He argued that to be a father did not logically or naturally entail being considered a lord. Rather, male lordship was the result of a contract of some sort of brute force. According to him, by nature the maternal role was dominant and this was so for two reasons: the identity of a child's mother alone was certain; and, the power over the child was initially in the hands of the mother who nourished and trained it. Only by an arbitrary agreement between a man and a woman, could a mother confer such rights on a man. Historically these agreements have been institutionalised in marriages which had various forms of dependence between husband and wife. By the right of nature the conqueror is seen as the lord of all that he has conquered. Domination over the infant first belonged to the one who first had him in his/her power. But it is manifest that he who is newly-born, is in the mother's power before any others in so much as she may rightly, and at her own will, either breed him or adventure him to fortune. If she bred him, because the state of nature was the state of war, she was supposed to bring him up in this condition, that being grown to full age he becomes not her enemy, which is to say, that he obeyed her. Thus in the state of nature, every woman that bore children became both mother and 'lord'. Therefore women were invested with the principal authority. Hobbes also adds that in the state of nature it cannot be known who the father is. But by the testimony of the mother, the child therefore became of the man whom the mother acknowledged and therefore hers. Thus the original domination over the children belonged to the mother.

As a social-contract theorist, Locke, too, rejected the patriarchal concept of civil authority that had historically been used to support the divine right of kings. He rejected the idea advanced by some that Adam was granted a divine right to rule and argued that even if God had conferred such authority, it was not necessarily passed down to his male heirs. He disagreed with Hobbes's assertion that power over children was derived from the reproductive act, and therefore by nature invested in the mother. Locke (1690) wrote in his "Second Treatise of Civil Government" that familial power was vested equally in mother and father, not in one OR the other. He supported this position on rational and scriptural grounds. Scriptures have revealed that children owe obedience to both father AND mother, while reason reveals that the child's physical and intellectual weakness and inability to give consent render it temporarily under the jurisdiction of BOTH parents, each of whom has an EQUAL share in its existence. Natural Law, i.e., the divine order inherent in the nature of things could only be enforced by them in order to preserve and enhance the freedom of the individual. Thus Locke's principles on authority were based on egalitarian principles.

The argument of Jean Jacques Rousseau stated that the family power is vested in the father. One of the consistent themes of his life and works was that women are inferior and subordinate beings who should be nurtured for one sole purpose — to be of service to men and to provide them pleasure. In "A Discourse on Political Economy" (1755) he stated that the primary function of the family was to preserve and increase the patrimony

of the father, so that he could pass it on to his heirs. He insisted that the patriarchal structure of the family was natural. Men may govern women but not men. He stated that the father being physically stronger than his children, his paternal authority may reasonably be established by nature for as long as they needed his protection. In the family it was clear for several reasons which lie in its very structure, that the father ought to command. Besides, authority ought not to be equally divided between father and mother; the government must be single, and in every division of opinion there must be only one preponderant voice that decides. Secondly, however lightly one may regard the disadvantages peculiar to women, yet, as they necessarily occasion intervals of inactivity this was sufficient reason for their exclusion from supreme authority, for when the balance was perfectly even, a straw was enough to tilt the scale. Besides, the husband ought to be able to superintend his wife's conduct, because it was important for him to be assured that the children to whom he owed obligations and whom he acknowledged and maintained, belonged to no one but himself. Thirdly the children should be obedient to the father, at first from necessity, and later on with gratitude; and further, since they had had their needs satisfied by the father in the first half of their lives, they ought to consecrate the second half of their lives to provide for him. He defined a woman's nature as being complete with her sexual and procreative purpose in life, while man has been categorised in terms of a generally unlimited potential for rational thought, creativity, and the like. His views were very consciously held and adamantly justified in spite of the fact that they violate all the major principles of his ethics and social theory.

WOMEN'S SUBORDINATION

Many writers have given various reasons for the subordination of women or the superiority of men. While analysing patriarchy Steven Goldberg (1973) stated that male domination was the result of male aggression associated with the hormone testosterone. Implied was the biological difference between men and women. Similarly Firestone (1977) attempted to build a theory of patriarchy in which different sets of patriarchal relations have their place. She suggested that child-bearing, breast-feeding, care of the child, pregnancy, menstruation, and all other aspects of the female biology of reproduction put women in a vulnerable position, which enabled men to be dominant over women. Dworkin's (1981) analysis says that women are used for pornography by men, and this has caused women's oppression by men. Patriarchy was seen as the primary form of social inequality. Kate Millett (1977) suggests that patriarchal relations have been found everywhere and have not been confined to any particular sphere of social life. She argues that every aspect of social life which included the family, power, economy, socialism, religion, sexuality, and psychology, contributed to the maintenance of patriarchy. Many writers are of the opinion that marriage and the connected sex activities have been negatively used and have kept women under control. Revolutionary feminists argue that heterosexuality has been the basis of patriarchal relations and it has trapped women in oppression by men. According to them sexual love obscured the realities of women's oppression and shored up male supremacy. In connection with this, Brownmiller (1977) argued that rape was used by men to intimidate all women and keep them in subjection.

Thus sexuality which has to be most personal has been used by men to wield power over women. The eminent academician Levi-Strauss (1956) instead of arguing for male superiority, took it for granted and hence he saw human society as primarily a masculine society; he built a theory of social origins with women as virtual 'commodities' exchanged in the 'transactions' of male operators. Engels considered the economic dependence of women on the male members of the family as the root cause of the subordination of women in all kinds of societies. Thus various authors have brought forward different reasons for the gender inequalities in society.

Patriarchal domination continues to exercise its authority even in present-day society and this can be attributed mostly to the social conditioning which is the root cause of gender disparity in society. This system of patriarchy deprived women of familial authority, which in turn made her an inferior being in the social system.

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SOCIOLOGY OF RELIGION: WITH SPECIFIC REFERENCE TO CHRISTIANITY AND WOMEN

Jean D'Cunha

I wish to thank the organizers for inviting me to make this presentation here today. My task is to examine the sociology of religion from a woman's perspective, with specific reference to Christianity and women. The canvas being extremely wide, I propose to limit and divide this presentation into five sections:

- (a) the role and position of women in contemporary society and the socio-economic and political basis for this role allocation;
- (b) the connection between religion and society;
- (c) the social context of Christianity and the resulting patriarchal biases that it has come to embody;
- (d) the impact of a patriarchal Christianity on Christian women;
- (e) the emergence of feminist theologizing within Christianity, as a source of empowerment for women.

I would like to begin by narrating an incident — a very telling one. A lady friend of mine, on meeting a German gentleman, a business associate of her husband, for the first time, was asked what she was doing. "I don't work," replied my friend, "I am a housewife." In turn she asked the gentleman if his wife worked and he replied, "Yes, very hard: she cleans, cooks, shops, and looks after my children and me. We cannot do without her."

Quite obviously the incident highlights one of the primary roles prescribed by society for women and internalized by women as well — that of WIFE and MOTHER. What needs to be pointed out here is that if a woman is not WIFE or MOTHER, she must be either a religious celibate or a vamp. Society provides little space for single women who do not belong to religious orders. The second issue that this episode raises is the undervaluation of domestic work. Domestic work is simply not considered WORK.

This makes it necessary for us to understand the basis for such, gender, role allocation for women in society and why domestic work is undervalued. This understanding must be located in the nature of our existing socio-economic and political structures, which I believe are capitalist.

To begin with, capitalism has consolidated itself at a global level. Its hallmark is generalized commodity production, in which labour power itself becomes a commodity for the generation of surplus value on which the system thrives. Women, as components of the labour force, sell their labour power together with men in the labour market and

are thus exploited as wage-workers. The gender-based division of labour in employment and the lower wage paid to women vis-à-vis men, for work of the same or similar nature, are other means of exploiting women to augment surplus value. All this takes place at the point of production and constitutes one dimension of capitalist production relations.

But capitalism is also concerned with the maintenance and reproduction of labour power. The system therefore resorts to a generalized division of labour in society. It assigns to women the primary task of maintaining and reproducing labour power for capital. Maintenance and reproduction of labour power include all forms of domestic work that replenish and revitalize the worker for the next day's work. It also involves the activities of child-bearing and care of the child, to ensure a stable and legitimate supply of labour power for the production of capital. Women are thus crucially linked to the economic system and play a vital role, the non-performance of which would bring the system to a halt. However, this linkage is blurred by the privatized, isolated nature of domestic work — it remains invisible and unpaid. Maintenance and reproduction of labour power is considered non-economic and unproductive. Domestic work, and women, its performers, are thus accorded a secondary and subservient status in society (D'Cunha, 1991).

UNDERVALUATION OF DOMESTIC WORK

In a commoditized social system, 'work' is defined as 'productive labour' — that which produces tangibles for exchange; labour then earns an income; labour that contributes to the Gross National Product of the nation. Work thus has a monetary significance attached to it. Tasks falling outside these parameters are considered 'non-productive', 'not work'. As already mentioned, domestic work in contemporary society, being privatized, isolated, invisible, and unpaid, is considered non-economic and unproductive. Domestic work is thus simply not perceived as work and it is no wonder that this activity and women its performers are accorded a subordinate social status (D'Cunha, 1991).

The categories "productivity" and "economic growth", considered uniform, universal, and progressive, are in fact restrictive, patriarchal categories, because, when viewed from the angle of women's sustenance production, they are a source of inequality (Shiva, 1988).

IDEOLOGICAL DIMENSIONS OF THE WIFE-MOTHER ROLE

So crucial is domestic work for the system that it requires an ideology that is well-internalized by society to sustain and maintain its performance by women. Domestic work is thus conveniently projected as a "labour of love" — a natural attribute of women, an intrinsic need and aspiration emanating from the very depths of the female being.

It is through this ideological mystification of the "wife" and "mother" roles as the primary, natural, and inevitable roles for a woman who labours lovingly for the family, that society ensures women's relegation to the privacy of the home and her engagement in domestic work complete.

While the wife-mother roles have been the primary socially-prescribed roles for women in all class-based patriarchal societies (not just capitalism), to ensure maintenance and

reproduction of labouring capacity, to keep the wheels of society moving, the institutionalization and rigid demarcation between the public sphere and the private space of home is really a product of the last 200 years or more of the development of industrial capitalism.

THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC BASIS FOR THE ROLE OF PROSTITUTE

In order to understand the socio-economic basis for the prostitution profession it is necessary to analyse the madonna-whore divide and the specific characteristic functions of each of these roles.

The institution within which the maintenance and reproduction of labour power is made possible to ensure a steady legitimate work-force for capitalism, is the patriarchal monogamous, family unit. However, monogamy, is by and large directed towards the woman. The property concerns of the ruling class and the desire to trace descent and inheritance through the male line, make the accurate establishment of paternity a must. This results in the stringent control over a woman's sexuality; the chastity of a woman before marriage, and her faithfulness to her husband after marriage, become cherished feminine traits and values. Women thus become the private property of their husbands, including the male's sexual property. Men come to own their wives' entire beings, controlling their earnings, thoughts, reproductive power, and sexuality. In fact a woman's honour comes to be linked to her body and sexuality (D'Cunha, 1991).

However, the double standards of male sexual morality in a patriarchal society, permit males to have access to sex and sexual pleasure in varied forms and with several women, a privilege denied to women. So while being sexually serviced by wives within marriage, society creates another institution outside of marriage, which caters to the male's so-called diverse sexual needs, natural sexual virility and aggressiveness, and to his supposed need for variety, all of which cannot or may not be satiated and contained within the institution of marriage (D'Cunha, 1991).

A section of public women is thus set aside to provide such sexual services to men. The institution of prostitution, which is the other side of male domination and class oppression of women, thus comes into being.

Women's entry into prostitution, particularly in third-world realities such as ours, is largely the product of a structurally-caused poverty that results from capitalist development. This poverty interacts with patriarchy that discriminates against women in education, in the job market, in every sphere of life so to speak, rendering poor women even poorer than poor men, in this generalised culture of poverty. Prostitution thus becomes a survival strategy for large masses of our women.

Patriarchal society thus divides women into madonnas and whores, each having a specific function, in order to control their lives at all levels. The former represents the ideal, chaste, faithful wife, the private property of her husband, the producer of her husband's children, who will carry on his line of descent and inheritance. The prostitute on the other hand is

the shared property of several males, denying a concern with chastity and exclusivity to the point of selling sexual services for a price. She is created to satiate man's 'diverse and uncontainable' sexual needs. While at one level society creates the institution of prostitution, at another level it castigates woman as the fallen woman (Barnett).

IMPACT OF GENDER ROLE AND TRAIT- STEREOTYPING ON WOMEN AT LARGE

Rigid gender role and trait-stereotyping has deleterious effects on women. Relegating woman to the privacy of the home and designating her primarily as wife and mother, confines and constricts her, rendering both woman's contribution and oppression invisible. Women as 'unpaid homebirds' are driven to a greater dependence on men. Defining women primarily as wives and mothers results in their marginalization from the larger public realm. If they do enter the job market, they are recruited into women-oriented jobs, which are extensions of women's traditional roles as nurturers or sex-objects reinforcing gender-type traits of women as weak, emotional, non-intellectual, non-technical, and the like. It is little wonder that women are over-concentrated in jobs like nursing, teaching, social work, modelling, typing, telephone-operating, and so on. Women workers thus carry to their workplace their subordinate status — a status that comes to define the value of the work they do. Women are thus paid less than males for work of the same or similar nature.

Rigid gender role and trait-stereotyping has resulted in women being marginalised from political processes in society. Women are by and large only superficially aware of national or international political events. The voting behaviour of women is largely influenced by the male members of the family. Women are scantily represented on local or national public bodies or political parties. For that matter, women do not have the financial wherewithal to contest in elections and if at all they participate actively in politics, it is largely because they possess family wealth or have male family members actively involved in politics.

Such rigid stereotyping underpins our legal system as well. One of the most glaring sexist biases in law, for instance, is the rape law, where the onus of proving that there was no consent to sexual intercourse rests on the woman. The presumption is that woman, being seductive by nature, may have provoked or invited the male to engage in sexual intercourse, in which case the act cannot be defined as rape.

Christian personal law is yet another example of prejudicial attitudes to women. It is premised on the sexist notion of "woman, the property of man", or "woman, the seductress". To illustrate the former point, if a Christian woman is proven guilty of adultery in a court of law, the court can order her lover to pay for the costs and damages of the case. Such a provision does not exist with respect to Christian males, proven guilty of adultery, almost suggesting that the payments for costs are a compensation for violating socially-prescribed norms for women and the husband's conjugal rights over her (D'Cunha, 1990).

The enumeration of the adverse effects of rigid gender role and trait-stereotyping could go on endlessly. What is pertinent to note, however, is that when such rigid stereotyping becomes society's yardstick to assess the quality of a human being — such as “good women” are those who are good mothers, good cooks, docile wives; “bad women” are those who are barren, career-oriented, undomesticated, sexually uninhibited — that the recognition and respect for individuality is lost. We thereby thwart the individual woman from developing her full human potential.

Having examined the social construct of womanhood and the oppression and exploitation women are subjected to, it is necessary to look at religion's construct of womanhood with particular reference to Christianity and draw the links obtaining between the social and religious construct of womanhood. This brings us to the next section of the paper, i.e., the relationship between society and religion with specific reference to Christianity and women.

RELIGION: ITS NATURE AND FUNCTIONS

Religion is defined as a response to an experience of the ultimate and sacred that plays a significant role in human life. For the expression of this response through history, religion needs to acquire a certain standardization by means of a process of institutionalization (Lourduswamy).

Institutionalised religion is therefore a more or less coherent system of beliefs and practices embodied in scriptural texts, rites and rituals concerning the divine. The asset of institutionalized religion is its continuous presence and availability to humanity, regardless of time-space differentials. However, institutionalized religion often results in a loss of spontaneity, creativity, and the ability to adapt itself to the changing needs and nuances of differing cultures and times (ibid). What needs to be asserted, however, is that religion is never an abstract set of ideas, values, or experiences, developed apart from the total cultural matrix. Religious beliefs, customs, and rituals can only be understood with specific reference to this matrix.

In this context, an important function of institutionalized religion is its legitimizing functions where, like other legitimizing socio-cultural structures, religion legitimizes the dominant, socio-economic, political system and relationships within it, subtly projecting the existing scheme of things as natural and inevitable or divinely ordained. Thus in patriarchal society, the religious world-view would generally seek to legitimize asymmetrical gender relations and women's subordination as natural, eternal, and divinely instituted. The Judaeo-Christian construction and treatment of womanhood must therefore be contextualised within the mode of production and position of women in ancient Israel.

MODE OF PRODUCTION AND POSITION, OF WOMEN IN ANCIENT ISRAEL

Ancient Israel is characterized as a segmentary society, dominated by household-centred agriculture. The family, clan, and tribe were the basic units of belonging. Household

centred production of consumption goods, necessitated a large family for the performance of economic activity. This inevitably resulted in an emphasis of fertility and childbearing. As kinship organization was patrilineal and patrilocal, there existed a strong preference for male children. Women were exploited as part of the labour force and as child-bearers. Though women contributed significantly to the economy, they were never considered independent producers. Another contributory factor to women's subordination was their sexual vulnerability (Dietrich, 1983).

Against this background, a free Israelite woman was defined in relation to a free Israelite man — as wife or daughter, but never as a person in her own right. Only as a mother or a widow was she dealt with as a person come of age. The family was patrilocal and patrilineal, as earlier mentioned, with descent and inheritance passing through the male line. Only in the absence of a male heir was a daughter entitled to inherit (Num 27,1-11). Until marriage a girl was under the authority of her father. A bride-price had to be paid for her (Ex 22,16. Dt 22,12); the man was "owner" of the woman and she was his "property" (Ex 21,3,22; Dt 24,4; 22,22). The status of woman as property is clearly evident in the regulations on adultery, based on double standards of male sexual morality. A man committed adultery if he slept with another man's wife, implying that he tarnished the property of another man. Whether he himself was married or not is of little concern (Dt 22,22. Cf. Lev 20,10). The regulations of the Decalogue go in the same direction (Ex 20,4; Dt 5,18). By contrast, a woman committed adultery if she broke out of her own marriage. Num 5,11-31 describes an ordeal for women under suspicion of adultery. A man had the right to have relations with prostitutes and slaves. It was possible for a man to marry more than one woman. A man could divorce a woman when he found something repulsive about her, by sending her out of the house and giving her a bill of divorce (Dt 27, 1ff.). The status of a woman improved with the number of children, preferably male children. If a man died without male issue, his brother or another male relative could take his wife in a levirate marriage (Dt 25, 5-10). Widows were socially weak and were an object of protection in the apodictic laws together with orphans and foreigners (e.g. Ex 22,21; Dt 10,18; 24,17-21; 26, 12f.; 27,19). Women were classified with forms of movable property of a man in the Decalogue (Ex 20,17). A woman could not even make views of her own, without having them endorsed by her father or husband, at least by their tacit tolerance (Num 30).

PATRIARCHAL INFLUENCE ON CHRISTIANITY

Against this background, it is not incidental that the Bible is itself replete with powerful socio-cultural images, myths, symbols, and assumptions expressing and rationalizing women's subordination in ancient societies, projecting this subordination back to the sacred order of God's creation and history with His people (Dietrich, 1983). The Bible is itself culture-bound, its authors a product of their times. The Bible therefore cannot but be impregnated by patriarchal biases against women.

One of the most decisive patriarchal influences on the theology dominating Christian history with respect to teachings on women, is the Aristotelian world-view on gender relations. Aristotle believed women to be intrinsically inferior, their inferiority and

subordination being a natural and biologically-determined phenomenon. To Aristotle the free, Greek male was the only fully-human being. Non-Greeks, slaves, and women were considered less than fully rational, with servility being an innate part of their nature. The free, Greek male thus constituted the superior, rational principle placed over the maternal, carnal, unfree principle, that included non-Greeks, slaves, and women (Bernadeen, 1983).

Biological theories such as these, that claim to understand and explain women's subordination, cast men and women into rigid stereotypical traits and roles. Accordingly men are naturally and biologically destined to be active, aggressive, ambitious, rational and intellectual; while women are naturally and biologically destined to be inert, docile, irrational, non-intellectual, and lustful. Further, men are naturally and biologically destined to be public figures, heads of households, breadwinners, producers and creators of value; while women are naturally and biologically destined to be wives, mothers, religious celibates, or vamps.

The biologistic Aristotelian world-view on gender relations was accepted by the Fathers of our Church who further gave it theological justification and implication. Consider the Church Fathers' perceptions of woman as the 'gateway to hell', as 'imperfect or defective male', as 'a peril to humankind'. Or St Thomas Aquina's belief that "as women did not possess the imminence of the free Greek male, they should not be ordained". Or the calendar of the Christian saints, where gender inequality in traditional Christian theology is most evident with male saints identified as Apostles, Bishops, Deacons, Fathers, and Confessors; while female saints attain sainthood through valiant defence of purity, chastity, or through widowhood and the like. Or some traditional Christian theology emphasis on the male-biased creation narrative of Eve being created after Adam, from his rib, suggesting the creation of woman as an after-thought, as subservient to man in a God-ordained hierarchy between the sexes. Or the narrative of the Fall, where Eve is projected as temptress, evil, and lustful — an innate, natural, and biologically-determined characteristic of women — a narrative in which the Fall is narrowly projected as a product of 'sexual sin' or the 'evils of sex'; a narrative which places the onus of responsibility of man's loss of paradise and the fall of humankind on woman, with successive generations of women reeling under the burden of this guilt.

Or consider the maleness of God and the Christ, exemplified in biblical language and imagery in the consistent use of the male personal pronoun 'He' throughout, or the imagery of God as Father, the Christ as Bridegroom, and the Church as Bride. The maleness of God assumes new dimensions in the incarnation of the Christ as man, consolidating the image of a patriarchal Christian God, which is effectively used to marginalise women from an active role in the Eucharist. For it is the Eucharist that above all expresses the redemptive act of Christ the Bridegroom towards Church the Bride. This is clear and unambiguous when the sacramental ministry of the Eucharist, in which the priest acts in 'persona Christi', is performed by men (Dietrich).

Not only does this phenomenon deny women the priesthood, it also accentuates the dominance of ideological formulations over material reality. In the words of Gabrielle

Dietrich, "while the image of the woman in revelation — suffering the pain of childbirth and threatened by the dragon — has a material base in real life, the appropriation of redemptive love by an all-male God and an all-male priesthood renders invisible and devalues the labour of women for the production and sustenance of life — an activity which in reality is crucially linked to the economic system. This corresponds to the understanding of creativeness (man as co-creator) by domination and subjugation of the earth (ibid).

Moreover, traditional Christian theology has determined the essence and vocation of Christian women with reference to the symbol and image of the Blessed Virgin Mother. Cherished feminine virtues for Christian women are thus virginity, purity, chastity, docility; while ideal role stereotypes are the wife-mother role or the untarnished religious celibate, akin to the image of the Virgin Mother. Not only do these rigidly-imposed stereotypical roles constrict the development of women's full human potential, they serve as an instrument of patriarchal oppression and control, while the combination of virginity and motherhood in the Virgin Mother — a phenomenon which cannot be imitated by flesh-and-blood women — only negates women's physical reality and the reality of organic life as a whole. Despite all bridal rhetoric, women's sexuality remains completely ignored. What remains unexplored in the symbol of virginity is its potential to express physical integrity and autonomy of women in opposition to patriarchal structures (ibid).

The list of patriarchal expressions and operations within Christianity and the Church can go on endlessly, but it would suffice here to say that rigid gender role and trait-stereotyping and patriarchal exploitation and oppression is not biologically determined. It is a social construct, given quasi-divine sanction by the Church, with elaborate theological formulations that endorse these asymmetrical gender relations rife in society.

IMPACT OF PATRIARCHAL SOCIETY AND CHRISTIANITY ON CHRISTIAN WOMEN

There is a popular misconception that Indian Christian women are liberated compared to women from other communities. Employment outside the home, convent education, westernized life-styles, fluency in English, a greater freedom to interact with the opposite sex, are taken as apparent indications of this. Reality, however, points to Christian women sharing common bonds of oppression that bind all women. We are also defined by the same, rigid, gender role and trait-stereotypes that bind women at large.

While it is difficult to obtain a community-based national statistical profile of the status of women, one can safely maintain that Christian women are discriminated against like all other women in the sphere of employment, politics, law, and the like.

Neither are Christian women spared the more extreme forms of abuse like sexual violence, dowry harassment, wife-battering and the like. Women's organizations in India are being increasingly approached by Christian women experiencing severe problems like wife-beating, sexual violence, alcoholic husbands.

Patriarchal Church structures are no kinder. Socialised to emulate a passive mother-image embodied in the Blessed Virgin Mary, women in the Church are relegated to decorating altars, organizing raffles, jumble sales and fetes, or cooking for the clergy; while decision making and-taking, including decisions concerning the lives of the laity, rests with a celibate male clergy. The representation of women in decision-making bodies of the Church is scant to say the least.

As mentioned earlier, Christianity's obsessive concern with virginity, sex for procreation — not pleasure — results in a denial of woman's physical reality, a wholesome experience of body, sexuality, and sexual pleasure as part of intimacy and enrichment in relationships. It is little wonder that women have been turned into inert objects in conjugal relationships. It is little wonder that we are made to see our natural body processes as unclean or burdensome. It is little wonder that our knowledge of sex, body, or methods of family-planning are so limited or distorted resulting in our floundering and fumbling in our own lives or in pastoral work dealing with issues of sex and marriage. It is little wonder that women considered as unclean is perhaps one of the multitude of reasons offered to push us off the ecclesiastical stage.

Further, it is partly within the context of enforced motherhood, sex linked to procreation, that control over women's fertility comes to be exercised through forbidding artificial methods of birth-control, thus violating women's rights to determine their fertility. Further, the Church seems to be obsessively concerned with hypothetical fictitious children, with scant regard for the quality of their lives or the mental, emotional, physical, economic and spiritual lives of women who bear the responsibility of children and care of children.

Or consider for instance the question of abortion. While I must state that I have a strong pro-life orientation, I am confronted with questions when faced with women who are victims of rape, incest, prostitution, and the like. Or with pregnant women whose lives are in grave danger. The Church's one, hard, pro-life stance gives undue precedence to the rights of an unborn child over that of the mother, resulting in literally or figuratively killing women economically, emotionally, and physically. Issues such as these, constitute grey areas within the Church, for which one has no clear-cut answers. These are, however, issues that require a serious critical review.

Having considered the legitimizing function of traditional Christianity that has rationalized asymmetrical gender relations in society at large, let us turn towards the more dynamic, prophetic functions of religion as a propellant for social change. For there are strong currents afoot within Christianity in the form of Feminist Liberation Theology that is re-interpreting traditional Christian theology from the perspective of women, so as to liberate and empower both womankind and humankind, at large.

FEMINIST THEOLOGY: ORIGINS

The existence of an all-pervasive, androcentric, Christian theology negatively impacting women, coupled with a complex of other factors, provides the contextual basis for the emergence of feminist theology.

The 1960s saw women social scientists, anthropologists, and psychologists, in the West, challenge the androcentric construct of knowledge — its methodology, database, values, assumptions, theories. They challenged gender role and trait-stereotypes as being biologically determined, asserting that they were a culturally-mediated phenomenon; they pointed to the linkages between patriarchy and socio-economic and political structures and the connections between patriarchy and capitalism showing a coincidence of interests between the two and the manner in which the former is appropriated by the latter to enhance its interests. Patriarchy being a socially-determined phenomenon, Western feminists/feminist scholars advocated a determined struggle against exploitative, socio-economic, political structures, as well as patriarchal structures, towards the development of a new society with humane and egalitarian relations, including gender-just and -equal relations. They therefore presented before us a transformation model of gender relations, which stood in stark contrast to the biological determinist and reductionist categories of male and female and gender relations that are oppressive and projected as immutable.

Drawing on this social-science research-data and analysis; drawing on the lived experience of women — women who combine multiple roles whose labour is devalued, female heads of households who are solely responsible for decision-making and sustaining the household economy, women who participate in militant struggles — drawing on the experience of the women's movement that was struggling to empower women; drawing inspiration from liberation theologies and their prophetic dimensions, that emphasized not only the God of nature but also a God of history wherein the Godhead was revealed through the events of human history: sections of women within the Church began questioning traditional male-centred theology and the convention engendered existence of women within the Church and in society at large. This provided fertile ground for the emergence of feminist theology.

WHAT IS FEMINIST THEOLOGY?

Feminist theology, a reflection on the social situation of women in the light of the Gospel, is a phenomenon rooted in the lived experience of women, in women's understanding of their subordination, in women challenging the validity of that subordination and gender-role trait-stereotypes, in women questioning a male-dominated theology and existing Christian practice. Feminist theology does not seek to discard existing theology, but to bring women's experience and perceptions that were for long denied to bear on existing theology, thereby enriching it and rendering it more intensive, while simultaneously bringing the essential Christian message of LOVE, JUSTICE, and EQUALITY, to bear on the whole endeavour. Needless to say feminist theology like other liberation theologies is a theology from below (Coll, 1984).

Like other liberation theologies or theoretical constructs, feminist theology is not a single-stream, monolithic enterprise. Two broad trends are discernible: revolutionary feminist theologians who perceive Christianity as irredeemably patriarchal and women's salvation in terms of the ability of women to free themselves from the shackles of a misogynist Christianity and Church. This stream of theologians have ultimately found themselves

outside the pale of Christianity and the Church. The other stream consists of reformist feminist theologians who seek to reclaim and recover those aspects of Christianity that they consider genuinely Christian in their reference to women, reinterpreting scriptural texts, myths, images, symbols so as to provide a positive and creative imaging for women (ibid).

METHODOLOGICAL PRINCIPLES FOR SCRIPTURAL REINTERPRETATION

Reformist theologians have had recourse to several methods in theological endeavour. Some have highlighted progressive pronouncements on women or positive biblical texts ignoring the conservative ones, or have in one way or another tried to harmonize conservative statements and texts with progressive ones. This approach has, however, been critiqued by feminist theologian Gabrielle Dietrich, who maintains that the Bible is overridden with conservative pronouncements on women which will, time and time over, be raised by conventional male theologians for every progressive statement highlighted. She therefore suggests a more comprehensive approach to reinterpretation of scriptural texts (Dietrich, 1983).

The following methodological principles in exercises to reinterpretate scriptural texts have been elucidated by Dietrich and theologian Tissa Balasuriya:

- a) Evaluating scriptural texts concerning women in the context of the essential and overall Christian message of LOVE, JUSTICE, and EQUALITY — the deepest expression of our faith (Bernadeen, 1983).
- b) Examining the socio-economic political structures of ancient societies and the position of women in them. This is what Dietrich calls the historical-materialist approach to reinterpretation of scripture, i.e., linking any statement on women to the social system of the time and women's role and status therein. This will furnish us with a mindset of the biblical author which reflects the patriarchal environs of the time, for theology itself is culturally determined. This approach will also provide us with insights into the inconsistencies of biblical writers in terms of whether they were challenging their patriarchal environs or acquiescing in it (Dietrich, 1983).
- c) Recourse to biblical sources to uncover women who have lived non-conventional lives and played non-conventional roles. These could be used as positive models for the emerging Christian woman today (ibid).
- d) Bringing our newly-developing consciousness of human rights, women's rights, of what is right and wrong to bear on existing theology and a reinterpretation of scriptural texts. For, the evolution of the human race in self-understanding and collective consciousness occurs under providential guidance and this constitutes one form of revelation of God to humankind (Bernadeen, 1983).

Against this backdrop, let us look at some concrete examples of reinterpretation of scriptural texts, myths, images and symbols relating to women, as this provides the

theological basis for active participation in women's concerns, both within the Church and in society at large.

THE CREATION NARRATIVE

Beginning with the male-centred creation narrative Genesis chapter 2, feminist theologians assert that creating woman from man's rib is indeed suggestive of a co-partnership and a belonging to each other. They further assert that God has stated, "It is not good for man to be alone." Solitary Adam is therefore not yet man. He is not the fulfillment of the creation of humankind. Eve has to be created as his co-partner — his mate.

Feminist theologians emphasize the gender-equality account of the creation narrative, i.e., Genesis Chapter 1, whose theme is mutuality, equality, and co-partnership. Man and woman are created together in the image and likeness of God. They are equal and immediate to God and His act of creation. God instructed both of them to have dominion over the earth — an expression of God sharing His positive, creative power, equally both with man and woman (Dietrich, 1983).

THE FALL NARRATIVE

Re-examining the Fall narratives, feminist theologians assert that it is ludicrous to project Adam as falling prey to Eve's temptations, for Adam had cognitive faculties, a free will of his own. Separating from God was an act of his own free will and judgement rendering it unfair to scapegoat Eve for the Fall of man and humankind.

Secondly, the Fall is understood more broadly than as a product of "sexual sin" alone. It is perceived as an expression of separation from the Creator, a falling-out of primeval harmony. Nakedness is a shame that results from the realization of erring and separation from God.

Suffering, pain, deprivation, exploitation, and oppression of some sections of humanity over others, including patriarchal exploitation and oppression, ensue as a result of the Fall. Women and men are thus reduced to stereotypical roles — women as wives and mothers, destined to suffer pain and anguish in childbirth — their productive labour outside the home is rendered invisible. Man is by contrast reduced to a toiler — alienated from himself, and from woman whom he dominates.

THE MALENESS OF GOD

Another issue of concern for feminist theologians is the maleness of God. However, there are many female aspects in the way that God deals with His people. Yahweh was not a male God in the same, oppressive, sexual sense as the male Canaanite gods who had consorts. His attributes of compassion and nurturance, His provisioning for the Israelites in the desert on their journey to freedom, are activities conventionally defined as material (Dietrich, 1983).

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The imagery used to describe God in the Old Testament is also feminine. God's compassion (rahamin), is derived from the Hebrew word 'rehem' meaning movements of the womb. The womb imagery is repeatedly used in Isaiah 2 and 3, where pain and shouting in childbirth are related to Yahweh. And Yahweh will comfort His people like a mother her children. Yet another powerful image of a mothering God is presented to us in the song of Moses where God is likened to an eagle that stirs up its nest, flutters over its young and spreading its wings catches them bearing them on its pinions (ibid).

Further, the kind of female attributes that God embodies are not qualities of sexuality or fertility, but of loving, caring, compassion, and nurturing. Though these qualities are conventionally perceived as female qualities, they are attributes that are crucial not just for womankind but for the whole of humankind — for they are attributes essential for the deepening and the enrichment of human relationships and human societies (ibid).

THE ISSUE OF CHRIST'S MALENESS: ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR WOMEN

The question of God's maleness assumes a new significance in the New Testament, with the incarnation of the Christ in male form. What message and implications does this have for women?

Firstly, feminist theologians point out that the Christ's maleness does not exclude any human being, whether male or female, heterosexual, homosexual, or transexual, from God's image or a life in his Christ. So, to use the incarnated Christ's maleness to justify women's subordination is totally unacceptable (ibid).

Secondly, if we believe that patriarchy is one of the results of the Fall, then Christ's coming is precisely to redeem us from the scourge of exploitation and domination, including patriarchal domination.

Thirdly, Jesus integrates both masculine and feminine attributes within his personality. He is active, assertive, rational, intellectual, courageous, a public figure whose integrity and commitment to a cause led him to challenge the establishment, resulting in his death. He was simultaneously loving, caring, nurturing, compassionate, sensitive, flexible, and receptive (ibid).

Moreover, Jesus often refers to himself using female imagery, symbols, and attributes. While talking to his disciples of his separation from them and his coming again, he captures their pain and final joy in the imagery of a woman in childbirth or for that matter, the christological symbols ascribed to Jesus in his statements of revelation are symbols that transcend gender-stereotypes, expressing as they do: growth, nurturance, e.g., "Bread of life", vine — a symbol of growth (ibid).

This integration of the masculine and feminine attributes in God and in the personality of Jesus Christ, are of far-reaching significance to women, to the Church, and to humanity. Firstly, it points to the fact that rigid gender roles and trait-stereotypes need not be used to define human beings. In fact they only limit human beings. It therefore really does not

matter whether the Christ is physically and visibly male. The process of becoming fully human requires that each individual be provided the opportunity to explore and realize his/her possibilities beyond artificially-imposed and tyrannizing role-trait-steretotypes. That in imitating Jesus Christ, males be willing to shed their domination and develop qualities of nurturance and sensitivity and engage in 'female tasks', in the same measure as women need to grow assertive and enter the public realm. In integrating the masculine and the feminine, Christ presents the possibility for males and females to develop androgenous personalities.

Lastly, being visibly male, Jesus's relationship with women in the gospels has significant implications for gender relationships. In stark contrast to the Fathers of the Church, Jesus related to women as human persons, violating social taboos and prescriptions of the time, thereby challenging the patriarchal norms of the day.

In Jesus Christ's plan for humankind, men and women both have the same value, commitment, and responsibility. He very definitely includes women in his ministry as his followers, his disciples, whom he taught and revealed himself to. They are not obliterated from the events of history. Luke shows Jesus as being helped and accompanied by some of the women, as well as by the twelve, naming and identifying some of the women (Drego, 1984).

This was at a time when women were primarily defined in relation to males as wives, mothers, or daughters; at a time when women were relegated to the private and invisible space of the home and were considered unfit to bear witness because they were considered liars; at a time when they were banned from reading the Torah, "Better to burn the Torah than teach it to women"; at a time when they could not recite the benediction after meals at home; at a time when they could not participate in the synagogue service — nor enter the temple proper — confined as they were to a separate section; at a time when they were to maintain silence during liturgical services (Rebera, 1983).

In the Jewish cultural ethos, where it was customary for the men to bond with an all-male fraternity at doorways or the city gates discussing public affairs, Mary, the sister of Lazarus, sits in rapt attention, listening to Jesus Christ's theological message; while her sister Martha complains about her not lending a helping hand in the kitchen. Christ responds by commending Mary and upholding her right to listen to his word. In doing so, feminist theologians maintain that Jesus Christ has called women to move beyond domesticity, to share as of equal right with men as listeners of the word — not just be servers of the household (Drego, 1984).

Or consider for instance Mary the Mother of Jesus. Scripture scholars maintain that she is not just an image of passive surrender but a woman of courage and power, whose 'yes' to God was a daring acceptance of a life of challenge, turbulence and turmoil. Both, Mary of Nazereth and Mary Magdalene in their commitment to a cause, demonstrated their unflinching support to Jesus Christ. Their accompaniment of him right up to Calvary and their witness of his ruthless persecution and gruesome death on the cross, exploded the stereotype of women as fearful, weak, and fickle-minded, especially at a time when the disciples had retreated in fear.

Further, it was a woman who was the first to witness the Risen Lord and it was to her — Mary Magdalene — that he entrusted the proclamation of the ministry of the word, thus urging women into active involvement in public life.

At a time when men and women did not converse and interact freely, at a time when women of dubious reputation were shunned, at a time when women could not be a witness, at a time when the Jews had nothing to do with the Samaritans, Jesus stopped to talk to the woman of Samaria with five Baals, revealing his “I am” message to her. Laying down her water pot in the same manner as his disciples had left their nets and boats and money tables, she went into the village to spread his Messiahship; and people, we are told, believed in Jesus on the strength of her word.

In a milieu in which widows were denigrated, Jesus values the contribution of the poor widow who puts in two copper coins, commending her for her generosity, upholding her as a model for his disciples. In raising the widow of Nain’s son, Jesus daringly challenges Jewish customs and laws of uncleanness, responding compassionately to the woman’s need to have her son alive (Drego, 1984).

At a time when Jewish customs considered menstruating-women unclean and unfit for human contact, Jesus healed the woman with the issue of blood and praised her faith (ibid). Even despised women of the times — prostitutes and women caught in adultery — were beneficiaries of Jesus Christ’s love and concern. His treatment of the woman caught in adultery and the “immoral woman” who annointed him, lashed out at the double standards of male sexual morality that predominated. For woman’s property status, as mentioned earlier, is most blatantly exemplified in the regulations on adultery, based on the hypocritical male morality.

EMPOWERING IMAGES OF WOMEN IN THE OLD AND NEW TESTAMENTS

Apart from emphasizing the progressive contents of Jesus’ relationships with women, feminist theologians recover powerful images of women from the Old and New Testaments as a source of empowerment.

Mahalah, Noah, Hoglah, Melcah, and Tirzah, the daughters of Zelophehad, for instance, were the earliest pioneers for women’s rights, demanding and winning rights of inheritance (Num 27:1-8 and 36:2-12); Deborah, warrior, judge, and prophetess (Judges 4:4) largely responsible for the Israelite victory in a decisive battle; and Jael who consolidated that victory by killing Aisera, the leader of the enemy forces (Judges 4:17-22 and 5:24-27); Miriam, the prophetess, leader, and singer responsible together with the Pharaoh’s daughter in saving Moses, and leading the Israelites across the Red Sea (Num 12; Ex 15:20-21 and 2:4ff.; and Micah 6:4); Huldah, the prophetess who interpreted scripture (II Kings 22:14-20); Rahab who sheltered Joshua’s spies and aided their escape from Jericho (Joshua 2); Esther the Queen who saved her people from destruction (Book of Esther) and Ruth and Naomi who took bold and fearless risks and decisions, and asserted and claimed their rights to food and shelter from Boaz.

In the New Testament, apart from Mary, the Mother of Jesus mentioned earlier, were Priscilla who instructed Apollos, a learned Jew (Acts 18:24-28), functioned in a ministerial team with her husband, and at one time even risked her life for Paul (Rom 16:3-5); Junia, an apostle whose conversion to Christianity preceded Paul's and who was imprisoned along with Andronicus and Paul (Rom 16:7); Phoebe, who was a Deaconess of the church, a patron and protector of Paul and who according to tradition carried Paul's Letter to the Romans to Rome; Lydia an independent business woman considered the first person in Europe to be converted to Christianity, her entire household being baptized along with her (Acts 16:14,15,40).

Such reinterpretation of scriptural texts, myths, images and symbols concerning women, by feminist theologians, thus provides the theological springboard for an active involvement in restructuring gender relations within the Church and in society at large. In doing so we would be living the essential Christian message of LOVE, JUSTICE, AND EQUALITY, which is a living expression of our FAITH.

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READING THE BIBLE: A FEMINIST VIEW-POINT

Sr Carona Mary, O.S.M.

The feminist movement has led scripture scholars to ask if past biblical exegesis had been scientifically objective. Questions arise at two levels: the first concerns the values and prejudices of the culture to which the writer belonged: was there not in the very process of the formation of the scriptures, the male dominant attitude of the patriarchal culture unconsciously playing down the contribution of women to salvation history as well as minimising the significance of this contribution to women themselves? The second concerns the value-prejudiced field of the reader. The reader, even a trained exegete, has his/her own mental attitudes developed by the values and prejudices of the prevalent patriarchal ethos in the Christian Church. Such a mental outlook interferes in the interpretation of the scriptures, making it more biased than objective. This can lead the reader to discount or ignore the contribution to salvation history, and the significance of biblical texts for, women in their growth towards the dignity and freedom proper to the children of God. Here comes the specific contribution of feminist theology.

THE NATURE OF BIBLICAL HISTORY

The Bible is first of all the record of the founding experiences of two major world religions, namely, Judaism and Christianity. Secondly, it is the record of the experiences of some people who built their lives around these experiences. Since the Judeo-Christian tradition claims historicity, we have to see how history was understood in these two traditions.

For the modern mind, trained in rational thinking, history is factual and therefore historical facts are an incontestable reality. For the ancient people on the contrary, myth is the medium through which reality is perceived and symbols were used to express the myth. For the rational mind, myth is fantasy or a figment of imagination. But for those who have deeper perception, mythical reality is trans-historical and more real and significant than historical fact which stops at the event. The Judeo-Christian tradition itself is an example of these two levels of mental functioning blended so that what we have in the Bible is history mythicised or, what we call, sacred history. It is history as proclaimed by believers, written down for the faith formation of other believers.

THE CORE EXPERIENCE OF JUDAISM AND CHRISTIANITY

In the Old Testament from the earliest Yahwistic tradition to the late Priestly tradition, the cultic creed of Israel centred around Yahweh who had freed Israel from her slavery under the Egyptians and made her his people. This is exemplified in Ex 6.6-7:

"Say this to the people of Israel: I am Yahweh and I will free you from the burden of the Egyptians; and I will deliver you from their bondage, and I will redeem you with an

outstretched arm and with great acts of judgement, and I will take you for my people, and I will be your God: and you shall know that I am Yahweh who has freed you from the burden of the Egyptians."

The meaning of being Yahweh's people was explained in the symbol of the Covenant. It gave a sacred character to the social code of Israel and inaugurated a new social order which was non-oppressive, just and free, in contrast to the social life they had before. The history of Israel was a struggle between the forces that tried to realise this new social order (especially the prophets) and the forces that led them to fall in line with the social structures of other peoples around them. It did not take long for Israel to succumb totally to the latter so that the Kingdom of God soon became a distant dream to be realised rather than a reality already achieved.

Christianity was a religious movement within its parent religion, Judaism. It began as a liberation movement to free people from the soul-less ritualism, ethnic exclusivism and discriminative social structures prevalent in Judaism at the time of Christ. At the heart of it was Christ's 'abba' experience... The mystery God Yahweh, whose name could not be pronounced, was experienced in a familial relationship: 'abba'. Such an experience found expression in ways which struck at the foundations of Jewish society and worship. It taught people to relate to God in simplicity and truth, as children to their father. By annihilating social discriminations, people were shown how to relate to each other in equality as brothers and sisters. John proclaimed that human persons were children of God and that they were born "not of blood, nor of the will of man but of God" (Jn 1.13). Peter announced that the saved "have been born anew not of perishable seed but of imperishable" (2P 1.4). Paul declared, "For as many of you as were baptised into Christ, have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither male nor female for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Gal 3.27-28).

THE HERMENEUTICAL PROBLEM

In recording these experiences as scriptures, were the inspired writers influenced by their culture? Today more and more research in the social sciences reveals the equality of the sexes in various aspects of human life and, apart from sexual differences, the gender roles are the result of socialisation. As this awareness takes root in people, society is inching towards a more egalitarian understanding of man-woman relationship. Will the Bible reveal a different message to one who reads it with a growing consciousness of the mutuality of the sexes? Finding answers to these questions will provide us with the key to the new hermeneutics.

It is significant that in spite of their exclusivism, Judaism and Christianity believed that they had a universal mandate. The followers of Judaism believed that basically they were a "kingdom of priests" (Ex 19.6). They were meant for others. In their name all nations of the earth would receive a blessing. Jesus, in John's gospel, as the representative of the Jews, says to the Samaritan woman representing the other peoples, that salvation was from the Jews (Jn 4.22). It was from the Jews but reaching out to every one. Christianity

developed a more rigorous exclusivism in spite of its claim to be catholic. It did not have the ethnic exclusivism of the Jews, but for centuries, it worked, in practice, on the assumption that salvation was only within the Church. It was a kind of eschatological clan identity, a kind of elitism that tended to look on others as untouched by revelation. Such an attitude does not make the best climate for learning from other religions or social sciences.

The patriarchal society of the Jews was very keen on preserving racial purity. So it was quite natural that women were reduced to the status of mute property. The subservient role allotted to women in Judaism was not merely due to its patriarchal structure but also due to its fierce ethnic consciousness. Israel was warned against marrying foreigners (Dt 7.3-6). At a time when the science of human conception was not yet developed, the fact that the male sperm and the female ovum have an equal share in the formation of a human foetus was not known. People believed that the child was the product of the father who provided the seed from which the child grew while the mother provided the soil for the growth of the seed for a few months. So ethnic purity depended very much on a woman's fidelity to her husband. The husband's multiracial harem did not affect ethnic purity in any way. Since racial purity had top priority among the Jewish people, legislation concerning women did not allow them to have a personality of their own. Much of the legislation in the Mosaic law was based on this understanding. While interpreting the Bible, we have to keep this in mind, and sanctions based on earlier ignorance must be re-read in the light of today's knowledge. In our attempt to understand the Bible, we must keep in mind the following facts:

1. Though revelation or God-experience takes place on the supra-conceptual level, while accounting for it and expressing it in our human situation it is conditioned by the ignorance or knowledge, the values and prejudices embedded in the culture of the human writer. Therefore to get at the revelation, one has to sift through these factors. To take cultural elements as revelation is distortion of religion.
2. On the part of human persons who are its recipients, revelation is evolutionary. The advance of the human and natural sciences contributes a great deal to this evolution because they increase the penetrating power of the human mind. Therefore, what might have been accepted and believed as divine ordinances at one time may not be accepted as such at another time. It is not because God has changed but that human understanding and experience have grown in depth. It is note-worthy that the first generation of Christians in the Council of Jerusalem decided that Mosaic law had become obsolete in the Christian dispensation (Acts 15.4-21).
3. In a culture where family lineage was traced only through males, how would the part played by women get any recognition? It is true that women like Judith and Esther got some reference. But they were not given a place in the mainstream of history, though their interventions were important events in their national history. To read the Bible from the feminist point of view therefore, we have to discover the significance of salvation history for women and bring it to light so that in Christian life, based on the Bible, the lost mutuality between men and women is restored.

4. If the scriptures are to be meaningful for people of all time, and anywhere, then one must be able to penetrate the cultural elements in which revelation is enshrined, get enlightened, be transformed by the divine message and express it in a way which is meaningful for one's own time and culture.
5. In the Church, the sacramental ministry, jurisdiction, official teaching, decision-making, administration, in fact the entire life is male-determined. In this climate it could be quite probable that scriptural exegesis was also affected by the dominant male perspective.

Now let us study a few texts pertaining to the founding experiences of Judaism and Christianity, keeping in mind the points mentioned above.

I. THE FOUNDING EXPERIENCE OF JUDAISM

a) Women saviours in the Exodus Story (Ex 1.15-2.10; 4.24-26)

At the beginning of the Exodus story we find a people oppressed and growing under the burden of the Egyptians. Against this background the Yahwist brings out in clear relief the power of women to resist the emperor's schemes to exterminate the Hebrews. He presents women as the first liberators.

The first heroines of the liberation story are the Hebrew midwives. Pharaoh asks them to kill the Hebrew male children as soon as they are born. Their resistance and non-cooperation is simple and firm. To make Moses go before the Egyptian king, Yahweh has to plead, coax, and give a series of assurances. But the appearance of these women before Pharaoh to explain their behaviour is very undramatic, simple and yet very dignified (Ex 1.15-19). They will not oblige Pharaoh. So he has to think up other means of exterminating the Hebrew males. They should be thrown into the Nile. Under the circumstances, Moses owes his existence to women who decided to defy the Egyptian king to save human lives. The next great heroine is Pharaoh's daughter who, knowing the baby to be a Hebrew male child, takes him to the palace to be brought up as her own son (Ex 2.6-10). Zipporah's quick intelligence saves Moses from sure death (Ex 4.24-26). Thus, irrespective of ethnic differences, the women of the earth are shown as very reliable and courageous mediators of God's deliverance of the people of Israel. These women change the course of history.

b) The Divine Name (Ex. 3.14)

At the heart of the founding experience of Judaism there is the very important experience of knowing God's name. The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, from then on would be known by a new name. The NAME in the Old Testament is not simply a convenient word to call or identify someone, but a revelation of the nature and function of the person. So the revelation of the divine name points to a new experience of God. In the name 'I am who am' or in the different translations of the same Hebrew name, there is no indication as to whether this divine being is male or female. But from very early times, the pronoun used for God was always 'he', making God masculine, though Israel's concept of God

transcended sex. The anthropomorphic climate of Israel's earlier theology along with the patriarchal culture of the people was responsible for this usage. But this does not mean that the feminine had no place in Israel's understanding of God. The divine Ruah is feminine and so is the divine Sophia. If these experiences did not find expression in theological formulation and Israel's God remained exclusively male, it is due in part to the influence of the patriarchal culture on the writers.

c) Suppression of women's role in salvation history (Ex 15.1-2)

In Ex. 15.20, Miriam is called a prophetess. She provides us with an interesting case-study which is an excellent example of how in the very composition of the scriptures, the patriarchal culture suppressed or wiped out women's contribution to sacred history. Ex 15.19-21 belongs to the Yahwistic tradition, which is the earliest. The term prophet or prophetess in the earlier period of Israel's history stands for a charismatic leader. So among the pilgrim people of God moving towards the Promised Land, Miriam was an important person exercising charismatic leadership. When the people crossed the Red Sea, it was she who organised a celebration to proclaim the great saving act of God in history. The Yahwist who in his creation story gave a place of dignity to women, points this out (Ex 15.20-21). But the later Priestly theologian robbed her of this liberation song, added more verses to it and placed it in the mouth of Moses (Ex 15.1-18), not even minding the anachronism of some of the verses (Ex 15. 13-17). These anachronistic verses clearly suggest that a later writer had created another story with Moses as the hero, replacing Miriam, the real heroine, and placed it before the Yahwistic text, so that when the readers first read the Song of Moses, they were impressed by it and afterwards when they read the single verse of the Yahwist about Miriam, their minds were set to ignore it.

d) The distorted women's role in the later tradition (Num 12.1-15)

We have yet another instance of Miriam's prophetic work which is certainly distorted by the later Priestly writer, making of her an example to silence women. In Deut 7.3-6, Moses is known as asking the people of Israel not to intermarry with other peoples. We may infer that there was a sense of religious and ethnic identity in Israel's consciousness that considered marriage with foreigners as a temptation which could lead them to be unfaithful to Yahweh. In spite of this consciousness Moses married a Cushite woman. When this happened, Miriam exercised her prophetic role and confronted Moses. As the Yahwist accounts, this is the oldest tradition. The Priestly writer who came centuries later made it out to be a case of jealousy (Num 12.2-15). According to him, Aaron and Miriam were jealous of Moses and said that God did not speak through or to Moses only. He spoke to them also, implying that they challenged the unique authority Moses enjoyed among the people. The Priestly writer's manipulation of the text is very clear. Aaron and Miriam complained about Moses' authority, but surprisingly, Miriam alone was punished. The Priestly tradition could not allow Aaron, the first high priest, to be punished; instead, the court of divine justice punished Miriam with leprosy while Aaron was not even tried. The Priestly writer did not mind projecting the image of an unjust God, but his concern seems to be that Moses should not be criticised. His message is clear. The leaders can give

themselves privileges denied to others; a priest could be jealous; but let not a woman speak, for even if she speaks the will of God for his people, she will be punished with leprosy and sent out of the camp. Do we hear echoes of this in the First Letter of Paul to Timothy in which Paul says, "I permit no woman to teach or to have authority over man; she is to keep silent" (1 Tim 2.12) ?

e) Woman in the Yahwist story of the Creation and Fall (Gen 2.18-24.)

Though the Genesis story is not part of the founding experience of Judaism, yet since it has greatly influenced the concept of woman in Christian thinking, I believe a brief analysis of it is not out of place here. This text belongs to the literary form of story. Like all prophets, the Yahwist addresses himself to the people of his time interpreting God's will for them. Living in the early monarchic period, he considers the man-woman relationship in his society utterly degrading and sinful especially in the royal palace and the king's harem with hundreds of wives and concubines. Since he cannot fix a time anywhere in the patriarchal history for a pristine, sinless, and egalitarian society, he takes it to the very origin of the human species and makes it a state that is lost before it is founded, but nonetheless showing the divine will regarding man-woman relationships. He imagines the origin of human society in its sinlessness, with one man and one woman. The loneliness in the midst of a multitude of helpful animals; the ecstasy of finding companionship in seeing one woman; the strange statement of the custom that was never practised in Israel — "Therefore a man leaves his father and mother and clings to his wife" (Gen 2.24): all this is geared to give the message that in the world as God created it, man and woman are equal. Using the ancient aetiology to explain why the rib cage covered only half of the human torso, he goes to the extent of saying that one human torso is made into male and female. According to the Yahwist, male domination is the result of sin (Gen 3.16) and therefore points to the sinful state of human life.

Even to describe the first sin, the Yahwist weaves his story from the material present in the events of his time. The tempter is the fertility god who was the perennial seducer of Israel and who in early religious art is depicted as a serpent. That the seducer reached man through woman is also Israel's experience, not because woman is weak, but because the fertility god belong to the foreigners whom the Israelites were forbidden to marry. At the time this story was written, Biblical history brings before us Solomon, the wise king who married foreign women and built temples for their gods. In the story of the Fall it is man who receives the law from God just as in the Biblical history, it is Solomon as member of Israel who was bound by law and not the foreign women for whom the worship of Baal was their religion. The first could be the symbol of the fruit-cakes used in the worship of the pagan goddess Asherah. In the story, the man receiving the fruit from the woman and eating it could amount to an Israelite man participating in the worship of Baal because of his pagan wife.

These two stories stand out as good examples of how a male-dominated culture can give an interpretation in keeping with its mental attitudes. The word helpmate is removed out of the context in which it definitely means an equal partner (the animals could not remove

man's loneliness) and used to connote someone subordinate, a kind of servant to see to man's needs. Forgetting that for a prophet the story has a purpose, it was used as an allegory and cases were made out to establish the superiority of man saying that woman was created for man, from a part of man and therefore inferior to man. The dynamism of the whole story of creation moves towards establishing equality in man-woman relationship which is basic for any social structure. The seducer image projected on to women based on the story of the Fall has no scriptural foundation whatsoever.

II. THE FOUNDING EXPERIENCE OF CHRISTIANITY

a. Women in the Christ-event

In the Christian movement, women had a responsibility equal to if not more than the men's. According to the gospel narratives, in the important happenings of the Christ-event, namely, the incarnation, death, burial, and resurrection, only women were taken into confidence by God or only they responded faithfully to the call.

The women disciples followed Jesus in his itinerary as much as the men — though the evangelists, except for Luke (8.1-3) mention them only at the crucifixion scene. Even at the Last Supper, we can suppose that women disciples were present. All the evangelists record that these women from Galilee were present at the crucifixion scene. They could not have been there on Calvary if they had not been in Jerusalem the previous evening the probable place in which they could have had their supper was with Jesus and his men disciples since they too were part of the group. Counting only men is a Jewish cultural element which we see in many places in the Bible. In the New Testament the messianic meal, namely, the multiplication of loaves is recorded in which men alone were counted leaving out the women and children. To say that women were not present at the Last Supper when Christ instituted the priesthood and on that account to exclude women from ordination is to ignore the cultural elements in interpreting the scripture. The incarnation took place in the virginal womb of Mary without the knowledge of man (Mt 1.18-19; Lk 1.26-38); at Calvary, women disciples were the only eye-witnesses at the death of Jesus (Mt 27.61; Mk 15.47; Lk 23.55) and it is they who first encountered the Risen Lord and gave the news of his Resurrection to the unbelieving men disciples. If we read Luke, chapter 24, carefully we will understand that the mandate to preach and to witness was given both to women and men disciples in the evening of the first Easter Sunday. In keeping with Jesus' instruction to stay in the city until they were clothed with power from on high (Lk 24.49), men as well as women disciples gathered in the upper room and devoted themselves to prayer, as a preparation for the gift of the Spirit (Acts 1.13-14). Finally the Spirit was poured out on all who were gathered in the upper room, on men and women alike. For centuries, the distorted reading of the scriptures prevented people from grasping the significance of the Christ-event. Were there only twelve eye-witnesses? What were they eye-witnesses of anyway? They slept through the agony (Mt 26.40; Mk 14.22.45-46), and were not in sight during the passion, death, and resurrection. If only the twelve had to be taken into account, then where did the seventy come from (Lk 10.1-12)? If they too had not been in the company of Jesus, they could not have been sent out to preach with authority. Why were the women disciples left out?

The numbers twelve and seventy are not to be taken literally in an exclusive sense. As the twelve sons of Israel were the foundation stones for the people of God, so the twelve apostles were the foundation stones for the new people of God. It was to get across the Good News to the people of Israel in terms they understood: God was making a new covenant, giving birth to the new people of God based not on whether or not they accepted the Law but on whether or not they accepted Jesus as Messiah. This was the significance of keeping to the number twelve. The Acts of the Apostles speak mostly of the work of Paul who was recognised by everyone as an Apostle, in fact a very important one in the apostolic group though he was not one of the Twelve. Similarly, in the Old Testament, the number seventy was again a reference to the seventy chosen from among Israel to whom the spirit of Moses was given (Num 11.16-17). The context is the constitution of Israel as a people, with Moses receiving the Law from God. Moses was responsible for the social and religious life of Israel taking shape according to the Law, and the seventy infused with his spirit share in this work. Jesus, the new leader of the new people of God gives them a new Law, the Law of Love, to shape the religious and social life of the new people of God; and he selected his co-workers with whom he shared his mission. Here the fact that Jesus is shown as the new Moses is more important than the number seventy and who they were. When the Gospel was written with such innuendo, it is not surprising that the part played by the women disciples was not given much importance. But in spite of that we can catch glimpses of Jesus' attitude towards women. He liberated them from oppressive structures and gave them a personality that was denied to them in the Old Testament. The early Christian community felt that in many ways Christianity was a liberation movement. Among the groups that felt liberated by Christ, women are an important one.

b. Women as persons equal in dignity

In the Gospel according to Luke, Mary of Nazareth, a woman, is shown as a model of Christian discipleship. She listened to the announced message and responded to the good news with the beautiful faith-response: "Behold I am the handmaid of the Lord; let it be done to me according to your word" (Lk 1.38). In a society where women were not accepted as witnesses, the baby Messiah in the Temple of Jerusalem was attested to by two witnesses, Simeon and Anna. A woman is shown as a witness equal to a man in dignity and reliability. Luke elaborates on the credentials of Anna as if to say that if the witnessing of such a woman could not be trusted, then whose could? (Lk 2.36.38)

c. Liberation from social taboos

In Lk 8.42b-48, Jesus de-sensitises the people of his time to the taboo of impurity connected with menstruation. While in a number of cures he asks the cured ones to keep quiet, in the case of the woman with a flow of blood for twelve years, he seems to be unnecessarily dramatic, bringing her to the open and making her confess that she touched the young rabbi. According to the Jewish law, a woman during the time of menstruation or one having a discharge of blood for many days was considered to be unclean and she made every one and everything that came in contact with her also unclean. She needed to be

ritually cleansed with water (Lev 15.25ff.). This woman had come into this crowd making so many unclean and, moreover, she touched the rabbi himself. All the fuss that Jesus made to bring her to the forefront is just to show that he was liberating women from such laws. To him they are persons — children of his Father — as much as men are.

d. Liberation from gender role

Jesus liberates women from the gender roles imposed on them by society. In the house of Martha and Mary, Martha symbolises the traditional role of woman, serving the preacher by cooking for him. Mary on the other hand represents discipleship in the fullest sense. Jesus could sit and discuss with her his vision and mission. He could not allow her to be dragged into the traditional role. His approval of the emerging role of women as one in which a woman could discuss a new religious vision with a man, in fact with the founder himself, is obvious. "Mary has chosen the good portion which shall not be taken from her" (Lk 10.42). To see in these two sisters, as some later theologians did, the images of the active and contemplative forms of life and infer that Jesus commended the contemplative form in contrast to the active, is unwarranted.

e. The ecclesial women

We saw earlier that in the important moments of the Christ-event such as the incarnation, passion, death, and resurrection, women proved themselves to be trustworthy and responsible disciples. In apostolic times women's leadership in the Church was an accepted phenomenon especially in the Churches among the diaspora.

Here are just a few examples:

Rm 16.1: "I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a deaconess of the Church at Cenchreae."

Rm 16.3: "Greet Prisca and Aquilla, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus."

Paul gives the title "fellow workers" usually to his direct associates in the work of the Gospel such as Timothy (Rm 16.21), Titus (2Cor 8.23), Epaphroditus (Ph 2.25), Clement (Ph 4.3), and others (Philemon 1.24). Prisca must have been a leading woman in the work, because Paul mentions her name before her husband's.

Rm 16.6,12 mentions the names of women whom Paul says "worked hard" in the Lord. He uses the term *kopiaō* a word he employs especially to refer to evangelisation work done either by himself or others.

Ph 4.2-3 mentions women who had laboured side by side with Paul in the Gospel, together with Clement and the rest of his fellow workers.

f. Cultural elements dominating Christian values

The Paul who accepted women labouring side by side with men, the Paul who accepted the four women prophetesses (Acts 21.9) and as a matter of fact stayed with them, suddenly takes it upon himself to silence women in the church! In 1 Cor 11.5 Paul argues that

women should cover their heads while praying or prophesying. Leaving aside his long-laboured reasoning which is built more on rabbinical thinking than on Christian theologising, it is noteworthy that he did not object to women prophesying or praying in church. He only insists that they cover their heads while doing so. But in the same Epistle he contradicts himself saying that women should not speak in church (1 Cor 14.34-35). How does one explain away the far more harsh prohibition, "I permit no women to teach or to have authority over men; she is to keep silent" (1 Tim 2,12); and worse still the statement that they would be saved through bearing children (1 Tim.2.13)? In the latter text, Paul seems to say that bearing children is the only function of women in the Church. Then in the next chapter he speaks of ecclesial women (1 Tim. 3.11) who seem to be holding some specific Church function along with bishops and deacons. Even if we hypothesise that a scribe had meddled with the Pauline writings, yet the fact remains that they are now part of the inspired writings.

We are nineteen centuries removed from the time of the Epistle and any hypotheses about the motivation or the circumstances of the writer can remain only as hypotheses which are unprovable. All that we can say is that the cultural forces were so strong that even among the first generation Christians the reverse movement had started. The egalitarian Jesus-movement had begun to be smothered by cultural elements, and oppressive structures started finding their way into Christianity.

The prophetic literature of Israel speaks at length about the spousal relationship between Yahweh and Israel. Leaving out the short Song of Solomon, this literature is hardly complimentary to Israel. While the divine lover's compassionate love and fidelity are emphasised, the human spouse is ever on the look-out to run after her many lovers. St Paul transfers the same symbol to Christ's relationship to the Church. The Church has to be washed and purified and her wrinkles smoothened in order to be taken up as the bride by the divine bridegroom. Such descriptions are all right when a spousal relationship between a divine person and a human person or group is considered. But how utterly degrading it is when the symbol is applied to two human persons united in marriage — the husband compared to the divine Lord and the wife to the sinful Church. Often enough, on their wedding day, a Christian couple is given this model to imitate — the husband who is already handicapped by the attitude that he belongs to the superior sex, is called upon to identify himself with the Lord and the wife is instructed in her obligation as the inferior creature to be submissive and to obey her lord in everything. How can love based on mutuality be possible for any couple if they follow the model proposed in Eph 5.25-29?

g. Influence of culture in the Christian concept of God

Jesus' 'abba' experience itself was influenced by culture. The reason why God who is a pure Spirit was experienced as masculine was the fact that Jesus from his infancy was brought up in Jewish piety. Christian theology made capital use of this fact and offering an explanation based on ignorance of human genetics affirmed that the father alone was the source of life. Theological explanations born of such ignorance should naturally change

as we grow in scientific knowledge. Holding on to the tradition of imposing masculinity to a God who is above sex and is a pure spirit, seems merely to justify the continuance of male domination in the Church. To address a personal God, if we want to use the term 'father', then it should be equally possible to use the term 'mother'. If we can relate to the Divine as pure spirit, then the proper pronoun is It.

CONCLUSION

For our consideration, I selected only the founding experiences of Judaism and Christianity for two reasons:

1. The founding experience of any religion is the foundational God-experience of that religion and as such the divine communication is found in its freshness, as yet much unsullied by later institutional structures. As such the essential liberative elements of religion can be found there.
2. An analytical study of all the books of the Bible with the feminist perspective is highly impractical considering the limitation of time available here and the size of the paper.

All the same, this paper points to a direction in scriptural exegesis which I hope will open up new perspectives in understanding the scriptures. We have seen that both in the writing and in the interpretation of the scriptures, the influence of culture has been considerable. Now our task is to be vigilant and not allow the gender prejudices of an ancient culture to cripple our faith experience. The Church is the mediator of the liberation brought about by Christ. If in the very understanding of revelation, gender prejudices are taken for divine messages, then our Christian vision gets distorted, so much so that the Church will give the lie to her identity as the sacrament of Christ, mediating liberation to all people.

A SEARCH FOR A MEANINGFUL DISCIPLESHIP OF JESUS

Tissa Balasuriya, O.M.I.

Our search in this Forum goes to the deepest question of the meaning of life. What is human life? From where do we come; what is our destiny? Philosophies, religions, theologies seek to provide answers to these questions.

Spirituality, one of our principal concerns in this session, is understood as what gives meaning to life. As one participant mentioned, it is the freeing of oneself to be able to share in freeing others.

Religion is a human creation with a sociological structure influenced strongly by the prevailing values and dominant structures of a society, such as patriarchy. Spirituality is a deeper relationship between one's inner being and the ultimate values one holds, though these too are influenced by one's perceptions and social conditioning. A person can be quite spiritual without being religious in the sense of participating in a particular religion. On the other hand someone can be very religious in terms of conforming to the external norms of religion and lacking in a deeper spirituality, in relation to the Absolute or the spiritual teachings of the Buddha or Jesus. The Pharisees criticized by Jesus were religious perfectionists, but who were far from the spiritual ideas of love of God and neighbour.

Spirituality requires a transcending of the barriers of religions and of religious life to the realisation of one's true self.

We call the Absolute or Transcendent, "God". In the Indian context, it will be easily understood that God is an ineffable mystery that is within us and beyond us, is incomprehensible. No human expression is adequate to define the divine.

Theology seeks to give a rational understanding or interpretation of the unknowable God, hence we must recognise the limitations of all theologies.

Christian theology reflects on God as borne witness to by Jesus who speaks of God as "Abba", Father.. Thereafter it has been interpreted and developed by those who claimed to be his disciples during the past twenty centuries.

A second consideration is that all human knowledge is limited by what influences it. Thus there is a study of knowledge itself and a sociology of knowledge. Knowledge is influenced by many factors such as the vested interests, presuppositions, and accepted myths of the knower. Hence a critical appraisal has to be made of all knowledge, including theology.

In this context we can have recourse to a twofold principle of critique that may be valid among us as theists and disciples of Jesus, who accept him as a good and reliable teacher. Whatever doctrine or practice is dehumanizing for persons or a section of humanity cannot

be from God or Jesus; and whatever is truly ennobling for all humanity is ultimately from God, the source of all goodness. This criterion is applicable to our theologies and spiritualities. In this connection we can reflect on the many experiences of dehumanization of women, especially women religious that have been studied in this session.

WOMEN IN THE HISTORY OF THE CHURCH

The position of women, and hence of women religious, also in the history of the Church has been determined by several factors. It is related to the way the sacred scriptures have been written and interpreted by men. It is also linked to the growth of patriarchy in the administration of the Church, especially after the house churches mentioned in the Acts of the Apostles gave way to more structured parishes and dioceses with priests and bishops at their head.

The evolution of Christian doctrine and pastoral practice, too, had a very significant impact on gender relations in the Church. The way theology was developed determined the identity and role of the leadership of the Church in the life of the Christian community.

Theologies are developed around two fundamental issues viz. the human condition in regard to our ultimate destiny, and the divine role in human salvation or self-realization. These presuppose our views on God and on the origin and ultimate goal of human life or an afterlife. Some of these factors, such as the origin of humanity and what happens to us after death, are not knowable by us with complete certitude.

The core teaching of Jesus as related in the gospels is that God is love and that we must love our neighbour as ourselves. His message is one of interiority, authenticity, fidelity to one's conscience, and loving service and justice towards the neighbour. He did not set up human mediators between God and humans. He assured his followers that the Spirit would guide each one interiorly.

He rejected or corrected the false claims of the religious leadership of the day. The high priests and Pharisees whom he castigated were males who claimed religious authority over the people. In that sense he contested the Jewish patriarchal religious establishment of his time. Jesus exposed and contested the male chauvinism of Jewish society and religion. In an anti-woman society Jesus was deeply understanding and loving towards women. He was killed by the Jewish religious leaders in conjunction with the Roman imperial rulers. His death was thus due to his clear stand against imperialism supported by a dominating religious patriarchy.

While almost all the men disciples fled when he was captured by the Roman soldiers, some women were faithful to him unto death. They believed in him despite his crucifixion by the unjust judges and cruel soldiers who were all males.

How then did the Christian religion, claiming to be from Jesus, become so anti-woman and exclusively male in its leadership? How did the community that has come from Jesus become one of the most intolerant and oppressive organizations in human history? How and why did the Church in later centuries participate in the burning of heretics in the centuries of crusades against Islam, in the killing of thousands of women as witches?

and in the extermination of entire peoples and civilizations as in the period of European colonial expansion?

In seeking a response to this question I found the theologies evolved in Europe and North America, though very valuable in themselves, were inadequate to meet our needs in Asia, especially due to the pluralism of religions. Latin-American Liberation Theology is more helpful in relating to our problems of long-term social exploitation. All the same it, too, is inadequate when it comes to other religions and issues such as the identity of Jesus and his role in salvation. Some schools of feminist theology are more helpful in that they take a more critical look at the whole of theology, and are critically evaluating Christology itself beyond the accepted traditional positions. In our Sri Lankan context we were searching for a theology that could dialogue in complete frankness with the other religions without any sense of Christian superiority, or of their inadequacy for human self-realization and fulfilment.

I had to go back to the history of the Church and the evolution of theology to try to find out where Christian theology and practice went wrong so as to justify such intolerance, excesses, and evils. In this process one finds that the development of Christian theology in the fourth and fifth centuries was such as to marginalise women, lay persons, and persons of other religions from the life of grace, unless mediated through the male Christian clergy.

In the early Church the spiritual life of the Christian community was based on the meditation of the scripture, the breaking of bread, and the sharing of possessions so that no one was in need (Acts 2,4). As taught in the Didache, the emphasis then was on the moral life of the believers. This involved an acceptance of all persons irrespective of social status or race. In Jesus Christ there was neither Greek nor Jew, neither male nor female (Gal 3:20).

Christians were then a counter-culture in the Roman empire. They did not submit to the cult of the emperor who claimed divinity, nor did they accept the false values of the empire. Their life and thinking were close to the poor and the marginalised. Suspected of disloyalty, they were persecuted several times during the first three centuries. Hence the numerous martyrs including many women, for their faith in the Church, often were led to martyrdom.

By the time the Church became the religion of the Roman Empire a substantial change had taken place in the understanding of the priorities of Christian life. The Church was then a powerful institution in the empire and the emperor sought an alliance with it, for his own advantage. Later this alliance with power affected the development of Christian theology itself.

The development of doctrine in the subsequent centuries led to definitions of the identity of Jesus and of his role in human salvation. These gave an exclusive salvific function to the Church as an organisation regarded as the unique vehicle of redemption. Authority in the church was vested in the male clergy who claimed power from Jesus Christ, the man-God.

The doctrinal definitions of the fourth and fifth centuries gave the Church a necessary and universal mission as well as exclusive means for human redemption. The sacraments of the Church were said to be essential for the life of grace. The clergy were the necessary ministers of the sacraments. They had to be male, as Jesus was male. Jesus was said to have given these powers to the twelve apostles who were males. Thus a complete ecclesiological structure and ideological justification were set up for male domination in the Church. This has been preserved to our day in most Churches.

RELIGIOUS LIFE

Religious families in the late 19th and early 20th century were inspired by the theology that prevailed in Europe and North America at that time. The goal of the Church and the religious congregations then was to serve the Church and save souls rather than build human communities and healthily transform social relationships and structures. Hence their works and activities did not generally have a liberative goal as considered necessary according to today's insights. They were very much oriented towards the service of the poor as social service, but not towards justice as such.

In revitalizing the charism of the founders of the religious congregations, it is useful to distinguish between their basic evangelical inspiration of love of God and neighbour, and the particular works being done by a religious congregation. The original inspiration is not only good, it even includes a protest against the evils of the day and an option for a poor life-style. These can help a contemporary renewal of each religious group.

APOSTOLATE

Education is one of the principal activities of religious. Education is necessary in society. Religious can and must be present in the educational services of a country. They should, however, endeavour to transform the educational system to be just to all. Unfortunately much of it is tied to the unjust social system. Religious therefore find it very difficult to transform it. It may even happen that they feel comfortable and secure within it. This is a major challenge to religious life in almost the whole of the Third World.

Generally religious congregations dedicated themselves to education beginning with the poorer classes and people. The impact of the social system, however, tends to make the schools run by religious also serve the more affluent groups in society. Hence we have to evaluate the content of our education, the methods or pedagogy, the beneficiaries, the relationships, the values imparted to the students, and their impact on society.

If our educational services help the affluent to obtain more advantages and privileges in society, and if the values imparted by the schools are consumeristic, capitalistic, and competitive, our schools will be counter-productive in relation to the right relationships in society and the values of the Kingdom of God. We have then to seriously rethink our presence and our priorities in the educational work, even though this may bring us much anxiety and even criticism from those who benefited from our services.

Service in the elite schools can have a bad impact on our way of life as religious. Are not the most competent teachers and administrators given to the running of the elite schools? How valid, in practice, is the argument that we can influence future society by training the children of the elite in our schools? Are religious themselves not sucked into the service of the elitist social order, to the extent that our own values and life-style are somehow adjusted to continue the educational system that bolsters, if not aggravates, the inequalities? There would then be a glaring incongruence between the Gospel we teach and the work we do, between our expressed message and our lives. We ourselves might not notice this due to our dedication to the cause we serve.

In today's circumstances non-formal education, adult education, value-education, and education through people's movements, are areas in which it may be easier to be more faithful to the call of the Gospel than through the formal educational system. Through them it may be possible to educate more persons concerning their social responsibilities. The contents, methods, relationships, and impact of such education would not only be different from those of the traditional school system, they would also challenge the religious themselves concerning their own values and life-styles.

A university committed to the service of the values of the Kingdom and right relationships, would orient its research towards an understanding of the social forces at work in exploitative societies. It would throw light on the exploitative and liberative processes in our societies. It would try to motivate the students and faculty to opt for an alternative set of values. Its library and social communications would be a help to the poor and the needy, the marginalised, and the exploited women and men.

True education inspired by the Gospel of Jesus is a dangerous enterprise. It was so in the time of Jesus; he was killed as he was considered a dangerous teacher who would alienate the people from subservience to Caesar. In today's repressive Third-World societies, the mission of Christian education is one that takes its devotees to share in the cross of Jesus more realistically. Martyrdom is the price of Christian education that presents the love of neighbour as the primary goal and motivation of Christian life. The spirituality of religious would change radically as they opt to transform their mission according to the call of Jesus.

One can make a similar evaluation regarding the health service. If the health services are given according to the income of the patients, then the poor are discriminated against. Religious cannot always give free services, but they can campaign for a more equitable distribution of the health services in the country. Likewise with regard to housing and transportation.

In our evaluation we should try to see the root causes of the social evils and needs: Are they due to human frailty as such or are they due to human injustice and inhumanity of some towards others? If it is the latter, the main effort should be to remove or at least check these causes. One of the temptations for religious is to concentrate their attention and dedication on relief to the victims of the situation and not struggle against the causes which are often related to the power holders in society.

The social work of religious is undertaken out of goodwill and with dedication. But not everything done with a good intention has only good effects. Our educational work may be good towards particular children, but within the overall society it may foster inequality and injustice. The subjective goodness of our intention does not make our actions necessarily without objective harm in society. Subjectively we may render a service to someone with great dedication, but objectively we may be helping to perpetuate an unjust system. Hence we cannot say that it helps the fostering of the values promoted by Jesus. This is often the case because these works were decided on in previous ages when the perceptions and priorities of religious life were different. Since we are now more aware of the power system in society, we must be careful not to be used by it for its benefit against the powerless.

FORMATION OF RELIGIOUS

The major paradigm shift in theology and understanding of the Christian life and mission has to impact religious formation in different dimensions such as in personal relationships and social commitment. In order to be aware of today's issues religious formation in the Third-World countries must include an introduction to social analysis. This will enable them to know their own society: the distribution of wealth, of opportunities and facilities, of power and influence, etc. They must be aware as to who controls political, economic, social, and cultural power, who benefits from it and who are marginalised, the ways of changing a given power relation so that all may benefit fairly from social power. A good objective study of one's society must be part of the formation of religious at all levels, each one acquiring it according to his or her competence, some at a more specialized level and others at a more general level. It is through such means that the signs of the times can be known and evaluated for the renewal of religious life itself.

The formation of religious has to include a practical understanding that social changes do not take place unless there is pressure on the powers that be for such changes. Those in power do not easily give up the benefits of power; they generally hold on to them till they are compelled to give up. If the love of God demands major social changes and if religious are committed to the radical pursuit of God's will, they must develop the means by which they can contribute towards changes. They need a training in peaceful methods of social change, in the creative and active use of non-violent actions for desirable changes.

These are, of course, a major challenge to religious life in our countries. Despite many resolutions at general chapters and retreats, little change takes place because we refuse to accept this aspect of the following of Jesus due to its difficulties and insecurities. It is only in countries where the issues have become acute and the church groups are very active that the religious have also been involved in significant numbers, as in the Philippines and South Korea.

Formation for these new ministries has to take place in the context of actual commitment to personal and social transformation. The traditional forms of novitiate and scholasticate were designed within the framework of the theology that believed that sanctity had to be advanced by a flight from the world. The understanding of the radical demands of the

Gospel can be experienced best in actual contact with those in need. Those who identify with them and see Christ in them, will generally be marginalized by the powerful. Sometimes in religious communities, too, such persons may find themselves considered foolish, biased, impractical, or even bad or mad as Jesus was thought of by his friends and relatives. Such an experience can have a formative influence. We need to train ourselves to continue in the service of the poor, whatever be the false charges made of the social establishment.

In the process religious have to grow in the spirituality of risk-bearing in difficult circumstances. The balancing of risk-taking with due prudence is to be learnt in practical life. But there are no fool-proof solutions to tough issues especially in the face of life and death. Since we are involved in a struggle on behalf of the people, we have to understand that there will be no yields without risks being taken. The religious families have to motivate members to offer their lives so that others may be safeguarded.

In modern times the traditional apostolates of teaching, nursing, and parish ministry seldom involve grave risks to life. This is one reason why the traditional religious life is now not attractive to enterprising young persons. In fact, the religious seem to be among the most cushioned against the vagaries of modern life such as unemployment, hunger, homelessness, and threats to life. As religious move into the front ranks of commitment to public issues, in a Jesus-like manner, they will be challenged by the love of God and neighbour to face greater risks for the common good.

COMMUNITY LIFE

Such work raises issues of community life for religious. There may be problems within the local religious community when one or a few religious are interested in direct social action for justice. The rest of the community may be indifferent or even opposed to them. They may be critical of their approaches and may even consider them bad religious. This tends to bring about an alienation among the members of the same community. The situation can become worse, if the major superiors are not in favour of such action for justice. A religious facing such a situation requires deep convictions concerning the call of God to love one's neighbour, especially the poor, and the meaning of religious consecration in relation to the struggle of the poor for justice and human dignity. The spirituality of perseverance is very important in this pursuit of religious dedication in a community.

It cannot be expected that whole provinces or congregations will opt for radical action for justice. This is because most religious did not enter religious life for this purpose. If one waits for a whole congregation or province to change, one may spend one's whole life hoping for it. The situation will become more difficult in congregations which are ageing.

In every congregation there may be some persons who are interested in social action. These can join with others who have similar interests in the area of concern and begin to take action as a group after due study and reflection. One's own religious community may not be the relevant grouping for such liberative action. It is only in the long run that one can hope for a whole community to understand, appreciate, approve and join in such

a mission. This is part of the sacrifice one has to accept, for even Jesus did not find acceptance and approval among his relatives, his local community or even his apostles. Very often the action of religious in movements for justice will be more appreciated by the oppressed with and for whom action is undertaken than by the rest of the religious community, the Church or by one's peer group.

We have to develop the spirituality of the group by studying, reflecting, working together, sharing risks and joys. Again this is a form of spirituality for which religious have not been formed in the traditional ways of formation. The group can give conviction and confidence in one's action. One's major decisions concerning action for justice will have to be taken with the group, while one's own religious community is kept informed; and hopefully they understand.

Very often committed lay persons are more generous and courageous in this regard than the religious. This may be one reason for the drying-up of vocations to religious life in many countries of the world. In Western Europe it is even possible to foresee the early folding-up of several religious congregations which had thousands of members a generation ago. This is a clear warning to the traditional form of religious life. If it is not updated to meet modern needs and thinking, it may soon be something of the past, like so many earlier forms of religious life. This seems to be a judgement of history in which we may even discern a message of God to the Church, inviting her to rethink her structures and motivation of religious life.

With the fast-changing social situation in which there is much greater social mobility and a greater inter-relation of women and men, we can expect the evolution of new forms of community of women and men, including religious and lay persons, single persons and families. For these, the community of mission and commitment is more meaningful than living under the same roof, and sharing a common rule of life. If religious life is to survive meaningfully into the future in Asia, it must meet this challenge early enough to evolve viable forms of life, action, and motivation, before the decline through ageing sets in.

Religious life can be understood as a consecration to find God's will in community along with the rest of society. Obedience then is to God's will discerned through such a process. They will need to be strengthened to take action for justice in difficult circumstances. We tend to make resolutions expressing our goodwill but do not persevere in keeping them because our will is weak. The obstacles to justice may include even the danger of death.

This is basically linked to poverty understood as a commitment to the cause of the weak and the poor whom Jesus loved, and to the eradication of poverty due to injustice. The formation of religious to voluntary poverty must include an understanding of the causes of poverty and a determination to struggle against enforced poverty that is due to injustice and lovelessness. Our acceptance of voluntary poverty should not mean a willing acceptance of the poverty that is enforced on others in an exploitative social system.

In order that religious may be a vibrant group in society, religious life has to die to its inward centredness and open out to frank dialogue with the majority of the people and to participation in their difficult, often unsuccessful struggles.

SIGNS OF HOPE

In this world much human suffering is due to poverty and oppression. Authoritarian regimes or emergency rule dominate almost all these countries, with India perhaps as the only significant exception. Social and communal conflicts are almost universal in the poor countries. Human rights are suppressed and national security is made the highest priority, almost an idol.

In such circumstances the religious have the opportunity and responsibility of standing up for human rights, human dignity, and peaceful and just solutions to the internal and external conflicts that engulf these countries. The Christian Religious Orders and Congregations are called to be witnesses to the ultimate values of truth, justice, peace, and love. By their consecration to God and their service of humanity in communities bound by vows to a total commitment, the religious can be signs of hope in desperate situations. In so far as they courageously espouse the cause of integral human liberation with honesty and sincerity, they bear witness to the meaning of human life and trust in God. There will be a manifestation of the triumph of love over hatred, of sharing over acquisition, service over power, and life over death. In facing dangers and giving themselves, after the example of the crucified Jesus, as victims for a more human world, they will help build better human relations and a more just and peaceful society in our countries. In this they can both fulfil their vocation and be a unique symbol and expression of hope that ever wells up in the human spirit.

RELIGIOUS LIFE: A THIRD-WORLD PHENOMENON

It is necessary consciously to develop a Third-World theology of religious life because increasingly Catholic religious life will be a phenomenon of the countries of the Third World. In Europe there has been a decline in vocations to religious congregations during the past 35-40 years. The entry of novices has been very meagre during the past decade. Several congregations have had to merge their novitiates and houses of formation in countries like France and Germany which supplied hundreds of vocations in the 1920s. Though the numbers are still high in Western Europe, by the turn of the century there will be very few religious below the age of 60 years. In the United States, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand, too, the decline in vocations has been phenomenal during the past two decades. In another 20-25 years there will be a huge gap in the age structure of religious congregations, even if there is a recovery of vocations in the future.

In the countries of the so-called, Socialist, Second World, the religious congregations were reduced in numbers due to the policies of the state. Poland, however, is an exception in having many vocations to the priestly and religious life. Catholicism is a rallying-point of Polish nationalism and the priests and religious have been in the forefront of the Polish struggle to maintain its identity as a nation and a people.

Yet there is a continuance of the First-World authority pattern in many of the more widespread religious orders and congregations. This is due to the larger numbers from Europe and North America (though much older), and the number of provinces in these

continents. Further, the Third-World countries have not yet arrived at a consciousness of their role and responsibility in the overall direction of religious life.

At this stage it will be useful for the religious in the Third World to devise ways to help their members who attend general chapters. Many more of them will be called to exercise international administrative functions. This training should include an analysis of their societies, an evaluation of religious life and a well-grounded theology of religious life in the Third World. Unless this is done on a more general level, each contingent of just a few representatives from these countries can hardly hold their own vis-à-vis the heavy weight of age and tradition behind the earlier orientations and priorities.

A few Asians, Africans, and Latin-Americans, chosen for such functions of international governance are likely to be overwhelmed by the prevailing orthodoxy and earlier commitments. It is only with time that we can hope for and expect a more serious response of religious life to the demands of the Third-World reality.

In 10 to 15 years' time the leadership of the religious congregations will have to pass into the hands of Africans, Asians, and Latin-Americans. Already there are a few Asian superiors, generals and several assistant generals or general councillors. Their number is bound to increase each year as the proportion of members from the Third World is increasing. Further, the persons of the age group who can exercise administrative and leadership roles (i.e., 40-65 years) will be increasingly from these countries.

It is therefore very important that religious life in the southern continents and in the East renews itself with a theology relevant to their situations, needs, and inspirations. If they do so, they will not only enliven their own religious communities but also be a blessing to the entire Church, for the Church too is becoming each year more a Third-World religious community. Those presently responsible for leadership of religious in these countries and religious formations, have a serious responsibility and a challenging opportunity for renewing this form of consecrated life in the coming generation. If religious life is not suitably renewed in the Third World, there is a clear likelihood that this form of communitarian religious life will dwindle and wither away in the early decades of the coming century. Given the immense potentialities of loving and courageous service that this form of religious life can inspire, it would be sad if it were to disappear due to our inability to renew religious life according to the call of God, the charism of the founders and the signs of the times.

EMPOWERING WOMEN RELIGIOUS

Margaret Shanti, ICM

We live without living
We die without dying
And yet...
We dare to dream
We dare to believe
We dare to hope
In a new day... tomorrow
For we know
That we are power!
(Asian Women Doing Theology, p.28)

In Indian history women were the first to be subjugated. With the Aryan invasion women were the first large group in Indian history to be enslaved. They were known as 'dasis' and were dark-complexioned, differing from the fair women of the conquerors. Later, with the colonial invasion came Christian missionaries. Western Christianity brought with it the Western model of religious life and with it the subjugation of women religious within an institutional model. Religious of India have to become aware of the older vocations and traditions of religious life in the country and dialogue with them. (cf. Oldest order of Nuns, Vidyajyoti, July 1993, p.430)

Women religious form the most visible aspect of the Church in India — 70,000 sisters from 198 congregations. Their institutions — educational, medical, technical, social welfare, orphanages — do technically possess certain powers in decision-making by the very nature and mode of organization. In fact women religious could be a tremendous force in the transformation of Church and society, yet they have not assumed any dynamic leadership or taken their prophetic role seriously. On the other hand, the situation within these religious structures, and the mode of organization of these prestigious institutions seem to indicate their position of cooptation with the status quo of the Church's hierarchy. That the CRI is aware of this is aptly reflected in one of its statements:

"We confess our sin in contributing to the oppressive structures within the Church itself: the sin of factions and divisions of caste and language; of mutual recrimination and suspicion among rites; of giving a lower status to women; of clerical and religious monopoly of power. We are aware that this sin within the Church has impeded her mission in India and prevented us from being instruments of liberation and witnesses of justice in society. We profess our desire for the grace of a corporate conversion of heart."

(CRI National Assembly, Dec. 29, 1991 to Jan. 3, 1992).

1. OUR TASK

We have set for ourselves the task of empowering women religious. This poses a basic question: Empowering for what purpose? And why aren't they already empowered, if they live and profess the Jesus Vision? If the vows are supposed to be 'freeing' then why aren't women religious free? What is the fundamental meaning of our being 'religious' — what makes us 'religious'?

In the Christian tradition, religious life has emerged as one of the most challenging phenomena, wherein women and men have come forward to live out authentically and radically the basic ideals of Christian discipleship. The forms of such a radical discipleship have been shaped according to the peculiar situation of each age. Women and men religious are not merely set apart, but are persons who have a felt need or conviction to live out a close following of Jesus of Nazareth. Viewed in this light, the religious state is a freeing experience, enabling individuals to give up societal values and those forces and psychic urges which are enslaving. Religious life becomes a liberative journey of faith, a charismatic and prophetic symbol.

But the history of religious life reveals the loss of its charismatic and prophetic force; instead, it has succumbed to the controls of an institutional Church that is growing more distorted and disfigured from its origins, by its centrist structures, male hierarchy, and its patriarchal bias. These have deep impact on the form of religious life for women: women have to consciously forget their being women, for religious life is defined and modelled on patriarchal concepts and ideals of what a woman religious ought to be. Up to date these continue to affect our lives as women religious, despite many renewals, for we continue to depend on male resource persons and their patriarchal ideologies, as well as internalizing these, so that any attempt at re-formulating or searching for new models or alternatives becomes impossible. Further, we continue to live and function within the hierarchical and patriarchal Church with its powerful legislations made by males and parameters of what and how women religious ought to be! It is time now for us as women religious to view ourselves from the feminine perspective and as Indian women — whether we will be able to face this challenge depends on our openness to respond, affirming and asserting our rights for autonomy and independent reflections in our efforts to empower ourselves and the mass of sisters! Let us begin now, by transforming our mind-set!

2. THE CONTEXT: URGENT CRY FOR LIFE

For the majority of the world's poor, conditions have become almost unbearable. Since the end of the cold war, reduction of economics to a single system — capitalism — which has reinforced the complexity of economics, political and social systems already depriving people of lands and livelihood around the globe. To consolidate their control, domination, and exploitation these powerful nations have created economic alliances: G 7, GATT, EC, OPEC, IMF, WB. Of special concern for us are IMF's and World Bank's lending and debt-payment policies dictated to poor debtor nations like India and other developing nations. In consequence, India has the highest level of malnutrition in the world as the UNICEF Report 1994 states: six out of ten children being under-nourished, and the actual rate is

63%. The biggest factor is labour migration due to unemployment and underemployment — the increasing predominance of women workers as migrants or refugees or domestic workers in other states and overseas is around 100 million.

Increased militarization, technological replacements of labour, and neo-colonial forces tighten the stranglehold. Woven into it are clusters of factors of domination which characterize this network: ethnicity and gender, culture and class, patriarchy and race, collusion and complicity, politics and militarism. An elite few in wealthier nations with connections in poorer countries benefit from this globalization of injustice. Widespread, too, are values of this dominant culture — materialism, individualism, and consumerism propagated through the new media culture of TV.

People's movements and protest voices have begun to resound against exploitation, human-rights violations, and the cry for life — these are the signs of hope! The Women's Movement in India which began in the mid-19th century worked to abolish Sati, child marriage, and to promote widow remarriage. The women's movement saw a new wave of dynamism in the 1970s spearheading protest voices against atrocities done to women, highlighting the actual condition of women in India. Within the women's movement, a tiny proportion of women religious contribute their mite to their commitment to the poor, especially poor and dalit women. As Jesus questioned "Where are the other nine?" we can ask: "Where are the majority of women religious?" Most of them are fully immersed in administrative and traditional services in institutions, far removed from the mainstream of a struggling people.

Recently Bharati Kannamma who was murdered by her husband, worked in a women's college in Trichy run by religious. Another woman, Thelekavathy, who worked in a women's college in Madurai run by religious, was brutally killed by her husband. Students, college lecturers, women's groups took up the issue, protesting on the streets through mass rallies, taking the case to lawyers and the police. But the role of women religious in these cases was minimal. How come that women religious who run prestigious colleges for women's education, have not taken up a more active part in legal action against such violence on their own staff member? What hinders us? What is our stand when women are victimised, discriminated against? The context of women in India is complex — a triple oppression of class, caste, and gender. Communal riots (Delhi, Bombay, Surat) and caste feuds (Vachati, Ponnur in T.N., Tschunder in AP) end up in mass rape of women as a form of vengeance against that particular caste or religion. Rape or sexual assault is experienced both in the home and in society. Young girls narrate cases of rape by their cousin or uncle or even brother or father! While the woman carries a stigma, the rapist goes scot-free. Violence against women is increasing alarmingly.

Some years back, women religious were jolted out of their slumber, when two sisters in Bombay, Sylvia, and Priya, were raped and murdered. So too other incidents of sisters being raped at Gajraula, Punjab, and sisters murdered in Kerala were reported; these cases have confronted us with our 'being Woman' and therefore aware of being vulnerable to the same atrocities meted out to other women in our society!!! One important component basic to our life is the fact that we do not seem to recognise our 'Identity as Woman'.

Unless and until we are awakened to this existential reality, we will not move out to be in solidarity with the oppressed and suffering women who have very little of the security or protection that we enjoy.

3. THE SPECIFIC CONTEXT OF WOMEN RELIGIOUS

Two specific blocks which control the lives women religious and prevent them from a liberative response to the poor, the dalits, and women, etc., are:

- (a) The Institutional Model or Structure of Religious Life and
- (b) The socio-cultural conditioning of the Indian women.

(a) The Institutional Model

In my contacts, meetings, and discussions with women religious of various congregations, I come across two ideological positions — those who uphold the institutional model and who form the majority; and those who live in insertion communities, who prefer the Incarnational Model and are a tiny minority. The rest remain confused and unclear.

The institutional model of religious life gives priority to the spiritual, to regularity, uniformity, and security. Despite efforts at renewals, and even re-visioning of their charism and mission, with preference for the poor, justice as ministry, inter-religious dialogue, etc., we have not been able to wriggle out of the mindset of the “institutional model”.

The institution implies a stratified structure and system of power, clear roles and offices, qualifications and skills. Ideologically the institution co-opts with the Church’s hierarchy and the dominant culture of the capitalist system. Role and Power relations dominate, are achievement oriented; and discipline is maintained to arrive at the goals set. The human person has only a secondary place within the institution.

Much depends on how leadership can create an atmosphere that is humane and free, whereby a more democratic set-up can be realised. Greater participation of members helps persons feel at ease, so as to freely express their views; and discernment and participative decision-making becomes a way of life.

Even religious who opt to live inserted among the poor in slums or villages, exposed to the insecurities and realities of the life of the masses, are often seen as ‘deviant’ or ‘suspect’. The questions often posed to them are centred round values inherent to the institutional model — as regularity, prayer timings, their religious decorum, spirituality. Whereas these women religious have grown as individuals, sharply critical of traditional religious practices, they are hence considered as threats. Some of them do feel disillusioned and frustrated by the conservatism of the majority and state that they feel suffocated by the resistance experienced.

Exposure of women religious to situations of injustice and the struggles of the oppressed, is one experiential method to make the majority of sisters aware and awakened. The resources and skills of their own sisters in the field can be utilised for conscientising. A

pertinent question has to be asked on the type of personnel we look for during vocation promotion. Do we look for persons who will easily fit into the institutional model or do we make a real choice for those who can think, have questions, are assertive, and spontaneous, creative, and free? What is our priority in the placement of personnel — the survival of the institution? or prophetic mission in insertion communities (incarnational model)?

(b) Socio-cultural conditioning of the Indian Women

Last year I spent some time reflecting on values with young candidates. From my observations and discussions these young women are relatively docile and passive, dependent and silent, socialised to domesticity by protective and loving parents who have done all the thinking and decisions for them. They are good, fine women, but reflect the condition of women in our society, and these are the young people who enter religious life. Will their formation reinforce the above qualities through a second process of socialization? or provoke them to think for themselves, remain spontaneous, take responsibility for themselves, and speak out their minds without fear???

Socio-cultural conditioning is a process whereby a person develops beliefs, values and attitudes, knowledge and awareness, of expected social behaviour with its appropriate norms, terms, and conditions. Early parent-child interactions and socio-cultural milieus, are basic to this socialization. When these have been internalized over the years, women become submissive, accepting their subordination to the male who is the norm. Women religious take for granted the sacramental and spiritual dominance of a male clergy in a patriarchal and pyramidal Church. Patterns of dominance-submission, radicalism-conservatism, independence-dependence have their genesis in early parent-child relationships. These are reinforced in initial formation.

“The deep foundations of the inequality of the sexes are built into the minds of men and women through a socialization process, which continues to be extremely powerful. If education is to promote equality for women, it must make a deliberate, planned, and sustained effort so that the new value of equality can replace the traditional value system.”

The institutional model keeps women religious protected and secure; their contact with society is minimal, and they are cut off from the daily struggles of people for their basic needs. Fostering an other-worldly spirituality, religious forget the realities of human existence, remain simple and naive, willing to be at the receiving end, without effort to participate actively in the lives of the poor as mission demands.

And so women religious have been the butt of ridicule by both laity and clergy because of their inability to think for themselves, to grasp the complexity of forces operating in society which divide people into rich and poor, class, and caste, as well as the internal problems within communities of women religious. Enlightened, women-religious leadership has to take a definite step to undo this condition, highlight the nature and mode of domination-subjugation and the consequent deprivation of basic human rights and opportunities for women religious. They have to seek ways of redeeming the lost or

surrendered values and plan for a better utilisation of the potential dormant among the masses of women religious, treat them as equal persons and, through personality-development programmes and exposure, facilitate their integral development as persons and as human beings. The following have to be consciously taken up:

- Through experiences and personalizing, help women religious to get in touch with their being women in a patriarchal culture and society.
- On this reflection, help them move away from 'passivity' to assertiveness, from conformity to take initiatives and recognize their own abilities, talents, and potentialities.
- Through opportunities enable them to think for themselves on various issues, and through discernment skills participate in decision-making.
- Through exposure to the conditions of the poor, dalits, women, environmental degradation, help them analyse critically the situation of exploitation and injustice through case-studies and relevant reading materials.
- Help ourselves through critical study of religions and ideologies to comprehend the anti-feminist trends within, which keep women subordinate, and to change these negative attitudes by first changing ourselves, aware of the fears of internalization of these prejudices and patriarchal values.

The liberation and advancement of women religious must be understood as an integral and crucial area of social liberation. If the bonds of socio-patriarchal cultural conditioning have to be erased, we have to probe further into the conceptual and religious framework which is part and parcel of our lives as religious.

4. CONCEPTUAL AND RELIGIOUS FRAMEWORK

We have reflected on how power relationships keep women subservient, similar to what exists in social relations of power between the classes and castes. These deny access to education, deny land or property rights to women; promote sexism in division of labour, sex stereotype traits, sanctioning of dominance through all kinds of social pressures, compulsions, and restrictions which control women's lives. To understand the religious and conceptual framework, the Forum of Religious for Justice and Peace through a survey studied how religion controls women religious's labour, sexuality, mobility, and the ideologies which operate. The category of patriarchy within religion can be studied under two significant aspects:

- (a) Dualism of Spirit and Matter: its impact on women religious
- (b) Sacred/Profane: A Feminist Social Theory of Religion.

(a) Dualism of Spirit and Matter: Its Impact on Women Religious

"Religious life is moving away from the dualism that has affected western civilisation since classical antiquity. Matter and spirit, body and soul, earth and heaven, this world

and the next, etc.” This quote from Br. Philip Pinto’s keynote address to the CRI National Conference, April 1994, can be accepted to ascertain the extent of the crux of the problem which keeps women religious away from social action. A social concern is the dichotomy into spirit and matter. It is “Spirit” which keeps women religious tied down to the institution as a model of religious life. The study-survey findings of the J & P Forum reveals that a large proportion of religious from four dioceses — Bombay, Ernakulam, Patna, Vijayawada, are not willing to forego the Eucharist when faced with the urgency of the ministry: those who would miss Mass often are high in Patna; this may be due to the rural-tribal character of the diocese. Even though several women religious get trained in theology, spirituality is a dimension of male control over women religious. In practice, spirituality is viewed as regularity for prayer and spiritual exercises, faithfulness to daily Mass and pious devotions. Sisters do complain that just when the women of the villages are free in the evenings, they are unable to meet them due to the time scheduled for evening prayer. In one area in Bihar, sisters who came from Madras, expressed that their superior general did not give them the permission to change their time of evening prayer.

The spiritual dimension is of far more importance than any other service, and even determines the essence of religious life itself. On the other hand the demands of mission is seen as secular. The Aristotelian dualism of spirit and matter, giving priority to the spirit over matter still continues to hold our mindset in its grip.

<i>Spirit</i>	<i>Matter</i>	<i>Virgin</i>
Superior	inferior	identifies with the spirit
intelligent	ignorant	spiritual
rational	emotional	controls/negates emotions
spiritual	biological	negates the body
male	female	neuter gender

The table shows how the female, if she wishes to overcome her inferior, lower, biological status has to become a virgin, through the negation of her body, taking on the ‘spiritual’ to be identified with the male. Here the spirit identifies with the male and becomes normative for the virgin. For the majority who have internalized and given weightage to the spiritual in their lives, other spiritualities and their positive contributions can help them break out of such a rigid category as ‘Spirit/Matter’.

Two important aspects can contribute to this re-interpretation of spirituality:

- i) A Life-centred spirituality and
- ii) A Creation-centred spirituality

i) *A Life-centred Spirituality* brings the religious woman in touch with the struggling masses of people, and brings one to a spiritual crisis which can be described as anguish, which comes from awareness and the costly consequences of one’s commitment to weak and marginal people. In such a spirituality, sacredness of life and sacredness of women’s

body is reclaimed, against all violence and human-rights violations. Spirituality which emerges from the lives of people invites compassion and passion, rooted in scripture, in Yahweh's attitude to the "cry for life and liberty" (Exodus, Isaiah, Hosea). Such a spirituality helps one to rethink the established concept of religious life, to review the vows and one's commitment, which get enfleshed in "pitching one's tent" among the poorest who live at the subsistence level, and to sharing of self, of being available, in the footsteps of Jesus of Nazareth.

ii) *A Creation-centred spirituality* moves away from any dichotomy to seeing the entire creation as inter-connected relationships. Instead of viewing the human as the centre of the cosmos, it must be acknowledged that the human is the 'steward' and not the owner who dominates, who exploits and rapes the earth. Such a creation-centered spirituality frees one from the dominant culture which has been Western and colonial, and inculturates us within our own soil and culture which is Easter, cyclic of birthing, growing, dying, renewing to new life, as well as inclusive of the 'whole'; as the 'yin'-'yang' invites us to.

(b) Sacred/Profane: A Feminist Social Theory of Religions

As primary goal of feminist research, we study gender power relations to liberate women and empower them. All religions with their 'Purity-Pollution Theory' have excluded women as unclean, as profane. Feminists claim women are not unclean, and reclaim the sacredness of women's bodies, women's lives. The sacred/profane dualism has been the major destructive force of religion, particularly its relegating of women to an inferior status because she is said to be unclean. Feminist analysis studies the role of religion in the social production of gender-based power relationships, which comes from the dominant culture, which is male, Western and colonial or male, Indian and brahminic.

Emile Durkheim with his key concepts of the gender-biased dichotomies of sacred/profane and religion/magic, has contributed to a feminist theory of religion. Just like the distinction between the "good/bad", the sacred/profane means "two distinct classes, two worlds which have nothing in common. Religion and magic are also separated in time/space. The religious/sacred belong to one world, the magic/profane to another. This dualism is maintained by beliefs and rites which insure that the sacred things are par excellence, that which the profane should not touch and cannot touch with impunity."

In primitive society, in one community old women symbolically fling the young man away from the women, and in another, with old men as helpers, break off a tooth and name the young man according to the shape of the resulting blood clot. In both, something is forcefully flung/broken — an act of violence. Power created by the force leads to violence, e.g., division of the world into sacred/profane. Through a thread of violence, social submission is maintained to a god through rites, rituals, worship. Social pressure exercises itself in spiritual ways. Durkheim equates power with domination, but feminists interpret domination as violence. And religion, as Durkheim sees it, has a tremendous need to repress, suppress, or make unconscious its link with domination and violence. Patriarchal Christian religion determined religious life for women, alienated from the

profane, to contemplate God within the space of the convent as the sacred. God was experienced away from the profane world. In our age, the impact of secularisation has to some extent removed such rigid distinctions. The incarnation model of religious life discovers the face of God among the poorest and suffering people, in one's neighbour. In spite of such alternate models, the greater majority of religious more easily respond to the Church's call to 'Evangelisation 2000' — a spiritual renewal, or the charismatic movement, SOLELY ORIENTED to the spirit's impact on the individual, for the miraculous or the extraordinary. These have a wider following than direct social action. Religious still prefer to centre their lives around the sacred/profane dualism. Durkheim's analysis holds this sacred/profane dualism responsible for the oppression of women. The source of social action rests, not literally on material conditions, but in 'thought', in religious thought that separates the sacred from the profane, through force and violence.

The feminist theory of religion makes a distinction between 'religion' created or socially produced by male forces, and 'spirituality' which is the life-experience of women and all excluded people. We have to ask what in this spirituality is useful for the ongoing struggle for liberation of all people.

The emerging popular spiritualities from oppressed people — Dalit, Red Indian, Latin-American, Indigenous, Black, Women, etc. — are the new spiritualities of subaltern cultures. The dominant world-view of the sacred/profane imposed by Western male colonialism has been rejected for it fostered a Third-World dependency or enslavement. Why have we allowed ourselves to be defined by the economic yardstick of the West? Hence the privatisation of violence against women — discrimination, rape, genital mutilation; hence, too, a male brahminic religion legitimized dominance, subservience, and violence in the lives of dalits, women, and all suppressed peoples. We have to de-colonise our minds to be open to world-views from the perspective of Third-World peoples, of oppressed peoples with their subaltern cultures who had been pushed to the periphery. Popular religiosity and spiritualities of the hidden and displaced people will uncover the failure of the dominant, e.g., the lullabies of the rich upper caste boost the male baby; but those of the dalits/women are lamentations — why are you born?

5. SCRIPTURE BASIS FOR EMPOWERMENT

(a) *Genesis Chapters 16 and 21:*

Sarah's slave-woman, Hagar, Abraham's concubine, is a powerful symbol of women in the Church. In terms of race she is an outsider, being an Egyptian; in terms of class she is a slave, and in terms of gender she is a woman, a concubine who bore Abraham a son, Ishmael. When she fled from Sarah's power, the first time, she encounters God in the wilderness and names God as "Thou art a God of seeing" (v.13). God had seen her situation and had given her hope to turn back. Hagar is the only woman in biblical tradition to claim: "Have I indeed seen God and lived after seeing Him?" (16.13.) Twice Hagar had been rejected and thrust into the wilderness / desert (21.9-21). And twice she experiences God's liberative power in her life. Hagar symbolises women who are rejected and marginalised as dalit women, as women workers, as women who are sexually exploited.

Through the eyes of Hagar these women hold the hope of reclaiming their place in the Church and in society, by becoming agents of change to usher in the egalitarian vision of humanity.

Women transform the categories of Rich vs Poor, Master vs Slave, Jew vs Gentile, Pure vs Impure, Man vs Woman, through their prophetic protest, their affirmation of their dignity; and God asserting through women a God on the side of marginal and rejected women. God in solidarity with women empowers women as human persons, and their role in shaping history. In Hagar God urges women to envision a new humanity emerging from the enslavement, from the subaltern cultures, from women!

(b) Numbers 27.1-11;36. 1-13

In the O.T. five named women, Mahlah and her four sisters, came to Moses and demanded their property rights, which were denied to them, for they had no brothers. For at that time when the men died, women's names were struck off and women had no property rights. Moses placed the problem before God and He agreed that Mahlah and her sisters were right. Later the men demanded that these five sisters marry within their tribe to keep the property within their tribe. Mahlah and her sisters have set a precedent for women to stake their claim not only for property rights, but for their rights as human persons. No one empowered them. The situation, namely, the forces of history, only can push us to take a stand as Mahlah and her sisters did. When they were denied their rights, they felt it keenly, and with determination spoke out their claims. Moreover, the authenticity of Moses is seen in placing the problem before God who always sides with those denied of their rightful place as human persons.

(c) Mk 7.24-30

The syro-Phoenician woman was gentile — a Greek, a woman — with a daughter who was possessed. She shows determination in liberating her daughter from the demon. Jesus not only marvels at the faith with which she determinedly insists, but widens his field of ministry beyond Judaea. When women are determined to get what they want, their ability to speak out easily happens. Women today have the model of a woman who dared to seek a liberative step to get rid of the demons that plague our society. An integral liberative thrust is at the core of the women's movement and prophetic protests.

To empower is to seek to create just patterns of relating, new forms of sharing and mutuality, being receptive as well as actively involved in ways in which God is already an 'energizing presence'. Empowerment affirms our inter-connectedness with the world. Just as I gather the world into me, so I too am gathered into world-becoming, with my whole relational nexus. Our potential for just relationships is related to our choices and power to change, symbolized in, e.g., the Cross (a symbol of God's solidarity with the processes for change towards a Just Human Community) or the women of the Chipko Movement, or Pandita Ramabai, or Medha Patkar, or courageous women leaders from the grass roots.

CONCLUSION

I would like to conclude with the statement made by the International Forum of Religious Global Solidarity at Tagaytay city, Philippines, August 21-31, 1993, in response to the Synod on Consecrated Life Today:

"It is the conclusion of this assembly that any discussion on contemporary religious life at this time in history must include:

1. A new theology of the vows centred in the reign of God, which today urgently affirms and mandates the insertion of religious congregations into prophetic ministries with and for today's poor, and which finds vitality in these vows only when they are lived within the context of the lives of the poor and care of the earth.
2. A deeper understanding of religious life as a historical following of Jesus Christ who proclaimed, lived and died for the reign of God, for the Year of Favour, which demands restitution to the dispossessed and which is even more relevant and meaningful to our own time.
3. A renewed appreciation and understanding of religious charisms, as catalysts for the analysis and comprehension of the roots of the inequities and injustices in the world in which they exist.
4. A revived theology of religious prophetism that calls religious beyond cooptation in the systems of this time, as they have been coopted in the past, in order to exist beyond the systems of any time.
5. A conscientious examination and revision of the patriarchal nature of the relationship between the Church institution and the Religious congregations of women and the implications of this for ministry and religious vocations.
6. A global analysis of those systems of injustice, domination, and exploitation that affect religious life- style and ministries both within their congregation and with the poor, and a profound conviction and support for those religious who respond to the human needs created by these oppressions.

"This Global Forum of Religious is calling both the religious of the world and this Synod of Bishops, to listen to the poor, to hear their experiences, to realise the contemporary nature of systemic and global injustice and its demands on the authenticity of religious life. A religious life, based on a theology of false asceticism, but unconscious of and unresponsive to the social sins of neocolonialism, classism, racism, and sexism, is a religious life far removed from a radical and historical discipleship of Jesus. We challenge ourselves and the religious of the world to conversion."

